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# ESSAY

ON THE

# NATURE AND IMMUTABILITY

OF

TRUTH,

IN OPPOSITION TO

SOPHISTRY AND SCEPTICISM.

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*Nunquam aliud natura, aliud sapientia dicit.—Juvenal.*

FIRST AMERICAN FROM THE SIXTH EUROPEAN EDITION.

PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY SOLOMON WIEATT, NO. 368,  
NORTH SECOND STREET.

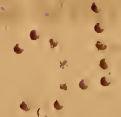
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# INTRODUCTION.

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TO those who love learning and mankind, and who are more ambitious to distinguish themselves as men, than as disputants, it is matter of humiliation and regret, that names and things have so oft been mistaken for each other ; that so much of the philosopher's time must be employed in ascertaining the signification of words ; and that so many doctrines, of high reputation, and of ancient date, when traced to their first principles, have been found to terminate in verbal ambiguity. If I have any knowledge of my own heart, or of the subject I propose to examine, I may venture to assure the reader, that it is no part of the design of this book, to encourage verbal disputation. On the contrary, it is my sincere purpose to avoid, and to do every thing in my power to check it ; convinced as I am, that it never can do any good, and that it has been the cause of much evil, both in philosophy and in common life. And I hope I have a fairer chance to escape it, than some who have gone before me in this part of science. I aim at no paradoxes ; my prejudices (if certain instinctive suggestions of the understanding may be so called) are all in favour of truth and virtue ; and I have no principles to support, but those which seem to me, to have influenced the judgment of a great majority of mankind in all ages of the world.

Some readers may think, that there is but little merit in this declaration ; it being as much for my own credit, as for the interest of mankind, that I guard against a practice, which is acknowledged to be always unprofitable and generally pernicious. A



verbal disputant! what claim can he have to the title of philosopher! what has he to do with the laws of nature, with the observation of facts, with life and manners! Let him not intrude upon the company of men of science; but repose with his brethren Aquinas and Suarez, in the corner of some Gothic cloister, dark as his understanding, and cold as his heart. Men are now become too judicious to be amused with words, and too *firm-minded* to be confuted with quibbles.—Many of my contemporaries would readily join in this apostrophe, who yet are themselves the dupes of the most egregious dealers in logomachy that ever perverted the faculty of speech. In fact, from some instances that have occurred to my own observation, I have reason to believe, that verbal controversy has not always, even in this age, been accounted a contemptible thing; and the reader, when he comes to be better acquainted with my sentiments, will perhaps think the foregoing declaration more disinterested than at first sight it may appear.

They who form opinions concerning the manners and principles of the times, may be divided into three classes. Some will tell us, that the present age transcends all that have gone before it, in politeness, learning, and good sense; will thank Providence (or their stars) that their lot of life has been cast in so glorious a period; and wonder how men could support existence amidst the ignorance and barbarism of former days. By others we are accounted a generation of triflers and profligates; sciolists in learning, hypocrites in virtue, and formalists in good breeding; wise only when we follow the ancients, and foolish whenever we deviate from them. Sentiments so violent are generally wrong: and therefore I am disposed to adopt the notions of those who may be considered as forming an intermediate class; who, though not blind to the

follies, are yet willing to acknowledge the virtues, both of past ages, and of the present. And surely, in every age, and in every man, there is something to praise, as well as something to blame.

When I survey the philosophy of the present age, I find much matter of applause and admiration. Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural History, in all their branches, have risen to a pitch of perfection, that does signal honour to human capacity, and far surpasses what the most sanguine projectors of former times had any reason to look for : and the paths to further improvement in those sciences are so clearly marked out, that nothing but honesty and attention seem requisite to ensure the success of future adventurers. Moral Philosophy and Logic have not been so fortunate. Yet, even here, we have happily got rid of much pedantry and jargon ; our systems have more the appearance of liberal sentiments, good taste, and correct composition, than those of the schoolmen ; we disclaim (at least in words) all attachment to hypothesis and party ; profess to study men and things, as well as books and words ; and assert, with the utmost vehemence of protestation, our love of truth, of candour, and of sound philosophy. But let us not be deceived by appearances. Neither Moral Philosophy, nor the kindred sciences of Logic and Criticism, are at present upon the most desirable footing. The rage of paradox and system has transformed them (although of all sciences these ought to be the simplest and the clearest) into a mass of confusion, darkness, and absurdity. One kind of jargon is laid aside ; but another has been adopted, more fashionable indeed, but not less frivolous. Hypothesis, though verbally disclaimed, is really adhered to with as much obstinacy as ever. Words have been defined, but their meaning still remains indefinite. Appeals have been made to experience ;



but with such misrepresentation of fact, and in such equivocal language, as plainly shew the authors to have been more concerned for their theory, than for the truth. All sciences, and especially Moral Philosophy, ought to regulate human practice: practice is regulated by principles, and all principles suppose conviction: yet the aim of our most celebrated moral systems is, to divest the mind of every principle, and of all conviction; and, consequently, to disqualify man for action, and to render him as useless, and as wretched, as possible. In a word, SCEPTICISM is now the profession of every fashionable inquirer into human nature; a scepticism which is not confined to points of mere speculation, but has been extended to practical truths of the highest importance, even to the principles of morality and religion. Proofs of all these assertions will appear in the sequel.

I said that my prejudices are all in favour of truth and virtue. To avow any sort of prejudice, may perhaps startle some readers. If it should, I must here intréat all such to pause a moment, and ask of their own hearts these simple questions: Are virtue and truth useful to mankind? Are they matters of indifference? Or are they pernicious? If any one finds himself disposed to think them pernicious, or matters of indifference, I would advise him to lay my book aside; for it does not contain one sentiment in which he can be interested; nor one expression with which he can be pleased. But he who believes that virtue and truth are of the highest importance, that in them is laid the foundation of human happiness, and that on them depends the very existence of human society, and of human creatures,—that person and I are of the same mind; I have no prejudices that he would wish me not to have: he may proceed; and I hope he will proceed with pleasure, and encourage, by his approbation,



this honest attempt to vindicate truth and virtue ; and to overturn that pretended philosophy which supposes, or which may lead us to suppose, every dictate of conscience, every impulse of understanding, and every information of sense, questionable and ambiguous.

This sceptical philosophy (as it is called) seems to me to be dangerous, not because it is ingenious, but because it is subtle and obscure. Were it rightly understood, no confutation would be necessary ; for it does in fact, confute itself, as I hope to demonstrate. But many, to my certain knowledge, have read it, and admitted its tenets, who do not understand the grounds of them ; and many more, swayed by the fashion of the times, have greedily adopted its conclusions, without any knowledge of the premises, or any concern about them. An attempt therefore to expose this pretended philosophy to public view, in its proper colours, will not, I hope, be censured as impertinent by any whose opinion I value : if it should, I shall be satisfied with the approbation of my own conscience, which will never reproach me for intending to do good.

I am sorry, that in the course of this inquiry, it will not always be in my power to speak of some celebrated names with that deference, to which superior talents, and superior virtue, are always entitled. Every friend of civil and religious liberty, every lover of mankind, every admirer of sincerity and simple manners, every heart that warms at the recollection of distinguished virtue, must consider LOCKE as one of the most amiable, and most illustrious men that ever our nation produced. Such he is, such he will ever be, in my estimation. The parts of his philosophy to which truth obliges me to object, are but few, and compared with the extent and importance of his other writings, extremely inconsiderable. I object to them, because I think them

erroneous and dangerous; and I am convinced, that their author, if he had lived to see the inferences that have been drawn from them, would have been the first to declare them absurd, and would have expunged them from his works with indignation.—BERKELEY was equally amiable in his life, and equally a friend to truth and virtue. In elegance of composition he was perhaps superior. I admire his virtues: I can never sufficiently applaud his zeal in the cause of religion: but some of his reasonings on the subject of human nature I cannot admit, without renouncing my claim to rationality. There is a writer now alive, of whose philosophy I have much to say. By his philosophy, I mean the sentiments he has published in a book called, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in three volumes, printed in the year 1739; the principal and most dangerous doctrines of which he has since republished again, and again, under the title of, *Essays Moral and Political, &c.* Of his other works I say nothing; nor have I at present any concern with them. Virgil is said to have been a bad prose-writer; Cicero was certainly a bad poet: and this author, though not much acquainted with human nature, and therefore not well qualified to write a treatise upon it, may yet be an excellent politician, financier, and historian. His merit in these respects is indeed generally allowed: and if my suffrage could add any thing to the lustre of his reputation, I should here, with great sincerity and pleasure, join my voice to that of the public, and make such an encomium on the author of *the History of England* as would not offend any of his rational admirers. But why is this author's character so replete with inconsistency! why should his principles and his talents extort at once our esteem and detestation, our applause and contempt! That he, whose manners in private life are said to be so agreeable to many of his acquaintance, should yet



in the public capacity of an author, have given so much cause of just offence to all the friends of virtue and mankind, is to me matter of astonishment and sorrow, as well as of indignation. That he, who succeeds so well in describing the fates of nations, should yet have failed so egregiously in explaining the operations of the mind, is one of those incongruities in human genius, for which perhaps philosophy will never be able fully to account. That he, who has so impartially stated the opposite pleas and principles of our political factions, should yet have adopted the most illiberal prejudices against natural and revealed religion: that he, who on some occasions has displayed even a profound erudition, should at other times when intoxicated with a favourite theory, have suffered affirmations to escape him, which would have fixed the opprobrious name of Sciolist on a less celebrated author: and finally, that a moral philosopher, who seems to have exerted his utmost ingenuity in searching after paradoxes, should yet happen to light on none, but such as are all, without exception, on the side of licentiousness and scepticism;—these are inconsistencies perhaps equally inexplicable; at least they are such as I do not at present choose to explain. And yet, that this author is chargeable with all these inconsistencies, will not, I think, be denied by any person of sense and candour, who has read his writings with attention. His philosophy has done great harm. Its admirers, I know, are very numerous; but I have not as yet met with one person, who both admired and understood it. We are prone to believe what we wish to be true: and most of this author's philosophical tenets are so well adapted to what I fear I may call the fashionable notions of the times, that those who are ambitious to conform to the latter, will hardly be disposed to examine scrupulously the evidence of

the former.—Having made this declaration, which I do in the spirit of an honest man, I must take the liberty to treat this author with that plainness, which the cause of truth, the interests of society, and my own conscience, require. The same candour that prompts me to praise, will also oblige me to blame. The inconsistency is not in me, but in him. Had I done but half as much as he, in labouring to subvert principles which ought ever to be held sacred, I know not whether the friends of truth would have granted me any indulgence: I am sure they ought not. Let me be treated with the lenity due to a good citizen, no longer than I act as becomes one.

If it shall be acknowledged by the candid and intelligent reader, that I have in this book contributed something to the establishment of old truths, I shall not be much offended, though others should pretend to discover that I have advanced nothing new. Indeed I would not wish to say any thing on these subjects, that has not often occurred to the common sense of mankind. In Logic and Morals, we may have new treatises, and new theories; but we are not now to expect new discoveries. The principles of moral duty have long been understood in these enlightened parts of the world; and mankind, in the time that is past, have had more truth under their consideration, than they will probably have in the time to come. Yet he who makes these sciences the study of his life, may perhaps collect particulars concerning their evidence, which though known to a few, are unknown to many; may set some principles in a more striking light than that in which they have been formerly viewed; may devise methods of confuting new errors, and exposing new paradoxes; and may hit upon a more popular way of displaying what has hitherto been exhibited in too dark and mysterious a form.



It is commonly allowed, that the science of human nature is of all human sciences the most curious and important. To know ourselves, is a precept which the wise in all ages have recommended, and which is enjoined by the authority of revelation itself. Can any thing be of more consequence to man, than to know what is his duty, and how he may arrive at happiness? It is from the examination of his own heart that he receives the first intimations of the one, and the only sure criterion of the other.—What can be more useful, more delightful, and more sublime, than to contemplate the Deity? It is in the works of nature, particularly in the constitution of the human soul, that we discern the first and most conspicuous traces of the Almighty; for without some previous acquaintance with our own moral nature, we could not have any certain knowledge of His.—Destitute of the hope of immortality, and a future retribution, how contemptible, how miserable is man! And yet, did not our moral feelings, in concert with what reason discovers of the Deity, evidence the necessity of a future state, in vain should we pretend to judge rationally of that revelation by which life and immortality have been brought to light.

How then is this science to be learned? In what manner are we to study human nature? Doubtless by examining our own hearts and feelings, and by attending to the conduct of other men. But are not the writings of philosophers useful towards the attainment of this science? Most certainly they are: for whatever improves the sagacity of judgment, the sensibility of moral perception, or the delicacy of taste; whatever renders our knowledge of moral and intellectual facts more extensive; whatever impresses our minds with more enlarged and more powerful sentiments of duty, with more



affecting views of God and Providence, and with greater energy of belief in the doctrines of natural religion ;—every thing of this sort either makes us more thoroughly acquainted, or prepares us for becoming more thoroughly acquainted with our own nature, and with that of other beings, and with the relations which they and we bear to one another. But I fear we shall not be able to improve ourselves in any one of these respects, by reading the modern systems of scepticism. What account then are we to make of those systems and their authors? The following Dissertation is partly designed as an answer to this question. But it has a further view : which is, to examine the foundations of this scepticism, and see whether these be consistent with what all mankind must acknowledge to be the foundations of truth ; to inquire, whether the cultivation of scepticism be salutary or pernicious to science and mankind ; and whether it may not be possible to devise certain criteria, by which the absurdity of its conclusions may be detected, even by those who may not have leisure or subtilty, or metaphysical knowledge, sufficient to qualify them for a logical confutation of all its premises. If it be confessed, that the present age has some tendency to licentiousness, both in principle and practice, and that the works of sceptical writers have some tendency to favour that licentiousness ; it will also be confessed, that this design is neither absurd nor unseasonable.

A celebrated writer\* on human nature has observed, that “if truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, it is certain it must lie very deep and abstruse :” and a little after he adds, “that he would esteem it a strong presumption against the philosophy he is going to unfold, were it so very

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 3, 4.

easy and obvious." I am so far from adopting this opinion, that I declare in regard to the few things I have to say on human nature, that I should esteem it a very strong presumption against them, if they were not easy and obvious. Physical and mathematical truths are often abstruse; but facts and experiments relating to the human mind, when expressed in proper words, ought to be obvious to all. I find that those poets, historians, and novelists, who have given the most lively displays of human nature, and who abound most in sentiments easily comprehended, and readily admitted as true, are the most entertaining, as well as the most useful. How then should the philosophy of the human mind be so difficult and obscure? Indeed, if it be an author's determinate purpose to advance paradoxes, some of which are incredible, and others beyond comprehension; if he be willing to avail himself all he can of the natural ambiguity of language in supporting those paradoxes; or if he enter upon inquiries too refined for human understanding; he must often be obscure, and often unintelligible. But my views are very different. I intend only to suggest some hints for guarding the mind against error; and these, I hope, will be found to be deduced from principles which every man of common capacity may examine by his daily experience.

It is true, that several subjects of intricate speculation are treated of in this book. But I have endeavoured, by constant appeals to fact and experience, by illustrations and examples the most familiar I could think of, and by a plainness and perspicuity of expression which sometimes may appear too much affected, to treat of them in a way, that I hope cannot fail to render them intelligible, even to those who are not much conversant in studies of this kind. Truth, like virtue, to be loved, needs only to be seen. My principles require no



disguise; on the contrary, they will, if I mistake not, be most easily admitted by those who best understand them. And I am persuaded, that the sceptical system would never have made such an alarming progress, if it had been well understood. The ambiguity of its language, and the intricacy and length of some of its fundamental investigations, have unhappily been too successful in producing that confusion of thought, and indistinctness of apprehension, in the minds both of authors and readers, which are so favourable to error and sophistry.

Few men have ever engaged in controversy, religious, political, or philosophical, without being in some degree chargeable with misconception of the adversary's meaning. That I have never erred in this way, I dare not affirm. But I am conscious of having done every thing in my power to guard against it. The greater part of these papers have lain by me for several years. They have been repeatedly perused by some of the acutest philosophers of the age, whom I have the honour to call my friends, and to whose advice and assistance, on this, as on other occasions, I am deeply indebted. I have availed myself all I could of reading and conversation; and endeavoured, with all the candour I am master of, to profit by every hint of improvement, and to examine to the bottom every objection, that others have offered, or myself could devise. And may I not be permitted to add, that every one of those who have perused this essay, has advised the author to publish it; and that many of them have encouraged him by this insinuation, to him the most flattering of all others, That by so doing, he would probably be of some service to the cause of truth, virtue, and mankind? In this hope he submits it to the public. And it is this hope only that could have induced him to attempt po-

lemical disquisition : a species of writing, which, in his own judgment, is not the most creditable ; which he knows, to his cost, is not the most pleasing ; and of which he is well aware that it cannot fail to draw upon him the resentment of a numerous, powerful and fashionable party. But,

Welcome for thee, fair virtue ! all the pas ;  
For thee, fair virtue ! welcome even the last.

If these pages, which he hopes none will condemn who have not read, shall throw any light on the first principles of moral science : if they shall suggest, to the young and unwary, any cautions against that sophistry, and licentiousness of principle, which too much infect the conversations and compositions of the age ; if they shall, in any measure, contribute to the satisfaction of any of the friends of truth and virtue ; his purpose will be completely answered : and he will, to the end of his life, rejoice in the recollection of those painful hours which he passed in the examination of this most important controversy.

*January, 1770.*







AN  
ESSAY  
ON THE  
NATURE AND IMMUTABILITY OF TRUTH  
IN OPPOSITION TO  
SOPHISTRY AND SCEPTICISM.

---

I PURPOSE to treat this subject in the following manner.

First, I shall endeavour to trace the several kinds of Evidence and Reasoning up to their first principles; with a view to ascertain the Standard of Truth, and explain its immutability.

Secondly, I shall show that my sentiments on this head, however inconsistent with the genius of scepticism, and with the practice and principles of sceptical writers, are yet perfectly consistent with the genius of true philosophy, and with the practice and principles of those who are universally allowed to have been the most successful in the investigation of truth: concluding with some inferences or rules, by which the more important fallacies of the sceptical philosophy may be detected by every person of common sense, even though he should not possess acuteness or metaphysical knowledge sufficient to qualify him for a logical confutation of them.

Thirdly, I shall answer some objections; and make some remarks, by way of *Estimate of Scepticism and sceptical writers*.

I divide my discourse in this manner, chiefly with a view to the reader's accommodation. An exact arrangement of parts is necessary to confer

elegance on a whole ; but I am more studious of utility than of elegance. And though my sentiments might have been exhibited in a more systematic order, I am apt to think, that the order in which they first occurred to me is the most natural, and may be the most effectual for accomplishing my purpose.

## PART I.

### OF THE STANDARD OF TRUTH.

THE love of truth has ever been accounted a good principle. Where it is known to prevail, we expect to find integrity and steadiness ; a temper of mind favourable to every virtue, and tending in an eminent degree to the advancement of public utility. To have no concern for the truth, to be false and fallacious, is a character which no person who is not utterly abandoned would choose to bear ; it is a character from which we expect nothing but levity and inconsistency. Truth seems to be considered by all mankind as something fixed, unchangeable, and eternal ; it may therefore be thought that to vindicate the permanency of truth is to dispute without an adversary. And indeed, if these questions were proposed in general terms,—Is there such a thing as truth ? Are truth and falsehood different and opposite ? Is truth permanent and eternal ?—few persons would be hardy enough to answer in the negative. Attempts, however, have been made, sometimes through inadvertence, and sometimes (I fear) from design to undermine the foundations of truth, and to render their stability questionable ; and these attempts have been so vigorously forwarded, and so often renewed, that they now constitute a great part of what is called *the philosophy of the human mind*.



It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to give a logical definition of Truth. But we shall endeavour to give such a description of it, as may make others understand what we mean by the word. The definitions of former writers are not so clear, nor so accurate, as could be wished. These therefore we shall overlook, without seeking either to explain or to correct them; and shall satisfy ourselves with taking notice of some of the mental phenomena that attend the perception of truth. This seems to be the safest way of introducing the subject.

## CHAPTER I.

### *Of the Perception of Truth in general.*

ON hearing these propositions: I exist,—Things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another,—The sun rose to-day,—There is a God,—Ingratitude ought to be blamed and punished,—The three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, &c.—I am conscious, that my mind readily admits and acquiesces in them. I say, that I believe them to be true; that is, I conceive them to express something conformable to the nature of things\*. Of the contrary propositions I should say, that my mind does not acquiesce in them, but disbelieves them, and conceives them to express something not conformable to the nature of things. My judgment in this case, I conceive to be the same which I should form in regard to these propositions, if I were perfectly acquainted with all nature, in all its parts, and in all its laws†.

\*—ὡς δ' ἑκάστον ὡς ἔχει τὸ εἶναι, οὕτω καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας.

Arist. Metaph. lib. 2. cap. 1.

† This remark, when applied to truth in general, is subject to certain limitations; for which see part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3

If I be asked, what I mean by *the nature of things*, I cannot otherwise explain myself, than by saying, that there is in my mind something which induces me to think, that every thing existing in nature, is determined to exist, and to exist after a certain manner in consequence of established laws ; and that whatever is agreeable to those laws is agreeable to the nature of things, because by those laws the nature of all things is determined. Of those laws I do not pretend to know any thing, except so far as they seem to be intimated to me by my own feelings, and by the suggestions of my own understanding. But these feelings and suggestions are such, and affect me in such a manner, that I cannot help receiving them, and trusting in them, and believing that their intimations are not fallacious, but such as I should approve if I were perfectly acquainted with every thing in the universe, and such as I may approve, and admit of, and regulate my conduct by, without danger of any inconvenience.

It is not easy on this subject to avoid identical expressions. I am not certain that I have been able to avoid them. And perhaps I might have expressed my meaning more shortly and more clearly, by saying, that I account That to be *truth* which the constitution of our nature determines us to believe, and That to be *falsehood* which the constitution of our nature determines us to disbelieve. Believing and disbelieving are simple acts of the mind ; I can neither define nor describe them in words ; and therefore the reader must judge of their nature from his own experience. We often believe what we afterwards find to be false ; but while belief continues, we think it true ; when we discover its falsity, we believe it no longer.

Hitherto we have used the word *belief* to denote that act of the mind which attends the perception of



truth in general. But truths are of different kinds ; some are certain, others only probable : and we ought not to call that act of the mind which attends the perception of certainty, and that which attends the perception of probability, by one and the same name. Some have called the former *conviction*, and the latter *assent*. All convictions are equally strong : but assent admits of innumerable degrees, from *moral certainty*, which is the highest degree, downward, through the several stages of *opinion*, to that suspense of judgment which is called *doubt*.

We may, without absurdity, speak of probable truth as well as of certain truth. Whatever a rational being is determined, by the constitution of his nature, to admit as probable, may be called *probable truth* ; the acknowledgment of it is as universal as rational nature, and will be as permanent. But, in this inquiry, we propose to confine ourselves chiefly to that kind of truth which may be called certain, which enforces our *conviction*, and the belief of which, in a sound mind, is not tainted with any doubt or uncertainty.

The investigation and perception of truth is commonly ascribed to our rational faculties : and these have by some been reduced to two ; Reason, and Judgment ; the former being supposed to be conversant about certain truths, the latter chiefly about probabilities. But certain truths are not all of the same kind ; some being supported by one sort of evidence, and others by another : different energies of the understanding must therefore be exerted in perceiving them ; and these different energies must be expressed by different names, if we would speak of them distinctly and intelligibly. The certainty of some truths, for instance, is perceived intuitively ; the certainty of others is perceived, not intuitively, but in consequence of a proof. Most of the propositions of Euclid are of



the latter kind ; the axioms of geometry are of the former. Now, if that faculty by which we perceive truth in consequence of a proof, be called *Reason*, surely that power by which we perceive self-evident truth, ought to be distinguished by a different name. It is of little consequence what name we make choice of, provided that in choosing it we depart not from the analogy of language ; and that, in applying it, we avoid equivocation and ambiguity\*. Some philosophers of note† have given the name of *Common Sense* to that faculty by which we perceive self-evident truth ; and, as the term seems proper enough, we shall adopt it. But in a subject of this kind, there is great danger of our being imposed upon by words ; we cannot therefore be too much upon our guard against that species of illusion. We mean to draw some important inferences from this doctrine of the distinction between *Reason* and *Common Sense*. Now these words are not always used in the strict signification we have here assigned them : let us therefore take a view of all the similar senses in which they are commonly used, and let us explain more particularly that sense in which we are to use them ; and thus we shall take every method in our power to secure ourselves against the impropriety of confounding our notions by the use of ambiguous and indefinite language. These philological discussions are indeed no part of philosophy ; but they are very necessary to prepare us for it. “*Qui ad interpretandam naturam accesserit,*” says Bacon, “*verborum mixtam naturam, et juvamenti et nocu- menti imprimis participem, distincte sciat\**.”

\* We might call the one *Reason*, and the other *Reasoning*; but the similarity of the terms would frequently occasion both obscurity in the sense, and harshness in the sound.

† Buffier, Dr. Reid, &c.

‡ De interpretatione Naturæ, sent. 9.

This distinction between Common Sense and Reason is no modern discovery†. The ancient geometricians were all acquainted with it. Aristotle treats of self-evident principles in many parts of his works, particularly in the fourth book of his *Metaphysics*, and in the first book of his latter *Analytics*. He calls them *Axioms* or *Dignities*, *Principles* and *Common Sentiments*\*; and says of them, “That they are known by their own evidence†; that except some first principles be taken

\* The *κοινωνημοσύνη* of the Greek Stoics seems to mean that benevolent affection which men owe to society and to one another. Some modern moralists have called it the *Public Sense*. But the notion or idea we mean to express by the term *Common Sense* is quite different.

The *Sensus Communis* of the Latins hath several significations. 1. It denotes this *Public Sense*, or *κοινωνημοσύνη*. See *Shaftsbury's Essay on the freedom of wit and humour*, part 3. sect. 1. *Note*. 2. It denotes that experience and knowledge of life which is acquired by living in society. Thus Horace seems to use it, *lib. 1. satir. 3. lin. 66*. And thus Quintilian, speaking of the advantages of a public education; “*Sensum ipsum qui communis dicitur, ubi discet, cum se a congressu, qui non hominibus solum, sed mutis quoque animalibus naturalis est, segregarit;*” *lib. 1. cap. 2*. 3. It seems to signify that instinctive persuasion of truth which arises from intuitive evidence, and is the foundation of all reasoning:

“Corpus enim per se communis deliquat esse  
Sensus: quo nisi prima fides fundata valebit,  
Haud erit occultis de rebus quo referentes  
Confirmare animi quicquam ratione queamus.”

*Lucretius, lib. 1. ver. 423.*

† Αξιώματα, Αρχαι, Κοιναι δοξαι—Λεγω δε αποδεικτικας, κ̃ τας κοινας δοξας, εξ ων απαντες δεικνυσσι' οιον, οτι παν αναγκαιον η φαναι, η αποφαναι. κ̃ αδυνατον αμα ειναι κ̃ μη ειναι.  
*Metaphys. lib. 3. cap. 2.*

† *Analytic. lib. 2. cap. 16.*—Of these first principles, a French peripatetic, who wrote about the beginning of the last century, expresses himself thus: “Ces principes portent le nom de communs, non seulement parce qu'ils servent à plusieurs sciences, mais aussi parce que *l'intelligence en est com-*



for granted, there can be neither reason nor reasoning\*; that it is impossible that every truth should admit of proof, otherwise proof would extend *in infinitum*, which is incompatible with its nature†; and that if ever men attempt to prove a first principle, it is because they are ignorant of the nature of proof‡.”

The word *Reason* is used in several different senses. 1. It is used to signify that quality of human nature which distinguishes man from the inferior animals. Man is called a reasonable being,

*mune à tous. On les appelle aussi dignitez, et notions communes : à scavoir, dignitez, quasi comme dignes entre toutes les autres qu'on y adjouste foy, à cause de la grande excellence de leur clarté et evidence ; et notions communes, pour ce qu'ils sont si connus, qu' aussi tost que la signification des termes dont ils sont composez est entendué, sans discourir ny argumenter davantage dessus, chacun entend naturellement leur verite ; si ce n'est quelque hebeté privé de raison ; lequel je renvoye à Aristote, qui prononce, que ceux qui doutent, qu'il faut reverer les Dieux, ou aymer les parents, meritent d'estre punis ; et que ceux qui doutent que la neige est blanche ont besoin de sens : et à Averroes, qui dit, que ceux qui ne scauroient distinguer ce qui est connu par soy d'avec ce qui ne l'est pas, sont incapables de philosopher ; et que ne pouvoir connoistre ces principes, procede de quelque defect de nature, ou de peu d'exercice, ou d'une mauvaise accoustumance enracinée.”*

*Corps de toute la Philosophie de Theophraste Boujou, p. 79.*

\* Μηδεν γαρ τιθεντες, αναιρεσι το διαλεγεσθαι, κ' ολως λογον.  
*Aristot. Metaphys. lib. 2. cap. 6.*

† Ολως μεν γαρ απαντων αδυνατον αποδειξιν ειναι. εις απειραν γαρ αν βαδιζοι. ωσε μηδ ουτως ειναι αποδειξιν.

*Aristot. Metaphys. lib. 4. cap. 4.*

‡ Αξιουσι δε κ' τωτο αποδεικνυναι τινες δι απαιδευσιαν· εστι γαρ απαιδευσια, το μη γινωσκειν τινων δει ζητειν απωδειξιν, κ' τινων ου δει.

*Ib. Ibid.*

I cite these authorities, that I may not be supposed to affect either an uncommon doctrine, or uncommon modes of expression.

and the brutes are said to be *irrational*. But the faculty of reason, taking the word in a strict sense, is perhaps not more characteristical of the nature of man, than his moral faculty, or his imagination, or his power of artificial language, or his risibility. Reason in this acceptation seems to be a general name for all the intellectual powers, as distinguished from the sensitive part of our constitution. 2. Every thing that is called truth is said to be perceived by reason: by reason, we are said to perceive, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; and we are also said to perceive, by reason, that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be. But these truths are of different kinds; and therefore the energies of understanding, to which they are referred, ought to be called by different names. 3. The power of invention is sometimes ascribed to reason. Locke tells us, that it is reason which discovers and arranges the several intermediate proofs in an argument; an office, which according to the common use of words, is to be referred not to reason, but to imagination. 4. Reason, as implying a faculty not marked by any other name, is used by those who are most accurate in distinguishing to signify that power of the human mind by which we draw inferences, or by which we are convinced, that a relation belongs to two ideas, on account of our having found, that these ideas bear certain relations to other ideas. In a word, it is that faculty which enables us, from relations or ideas that are known, to investigate such as are unknown; and without which we never could proceed in the discovery of truth a single step beyond first principles or intuitive axioms. And it is in this last sense we are to use the word *Reason* in the course of this inquiry.

The term *Common Sense* has also several different significations. 1. Sometimes it seems to be



synonymous with prudence. Thus we say, that a man has a large stock of common sense, who is quick in perceiving remote consequences, and thence instantaneously determines concerning the propriety of present conduct. 2. Common Sense, in certain instances, seemeth to be confounded with some of the powers of taste. We often meet with persons of great sagacity in most of the ordinary affairs of life, and very capable of accurate reasoning, who yet, without any bad intention, commit the most egregious blunders in regard to decorum; both saying and doing what is offensive to their company, and inconsistent with their own character: and this we are apt to impute to a defect in common sense. But it seems rather to be owing to a defect in that kind of sensibility, or sympathy, by which we suppose ourselves in the situations of others, adopt their sentiments, and in a manner perceive their very thoughts: and which is indeed the foundation of good breeding\*. It is by this secret, and sudden, and (to those who are unacquainted with it) inexplicable, communication of feelings, that a man is enabled to avoid what would appear incongruous or offensive. They who are prompted by inclination, or obliged by necessity, to study the art of recommending themselves to others, acquire a wonderful facility in perceiving and avoiding all possible ways of giving offence: which is a proof, that this kind of sensibility may be much improved by habit: although there are, no doubt, in respect of this, as well as of all other modifications of perception, original and constitutional differences in the frame of different minds. 3. Some men are distinguished by an uncommon acuteness in discovering the characters of others: they seem to read the soul in the countenance, and

\* See Smith's Theory of moral sentiments. sect. 1.

with a single glance to penetrate the deepest recesses of the heart. In their presence, the hypocrite is detected, notwithstanding his specious outside; the gay effrontery of the coxcomb cannot conceal his insignificance; and the man of merit appears conspicuous under all the disguises of an unassuming and ungainly modesty. This talent is sometimes called *Common Sense*; but very improperly. It is far from being common; it is even exceedingly rare: it is to be found in men who are not remarkable for any other mental excellence; and we often see those who in other respects are judicious enough, quite destitute of it. 4. Neither ought every common opinion to be referred to common sense. Modes in dress, religion, and conversation, however absurd in themselves, may suit the notions or the taste of a particular people: but none of us will say, that it is agreeable to common sense, to worship more gods than one; to believe that one and the same body may be in ten thousand different places at the same time\*; to like a face the better because it is painted, or to dislike a person because he does not lisp in his pronunciation. Lastly, The term *Common Sense* hath in modern times been used by philosophers, both French and British, to signify that power of the mind which perceives truth, or commands belief, not by progressive argumentation, but by an instantaneous, instinctive, and irresistible impulse; derived neither from education nor from habit, but from nature; acting independently on our will, whenever its object is presented, according to an established law, and therefore not improperly called *Sense*†; and acting in a similar manner upon all,

\* Transubstantiation.

† For the circumstances that characterise a *Sense*, see Dr. Gerard's Essay on Taste, part 3. sect. 1. Note.



or at least upon a great majority of mankind, and therefore properly called *Common Sense*. It is in this signification that the term *Common Sense* is used in the present inquiry.

That there is a real and essential difference between these two faculties: that common sense cannot be accounted for, by being called the perfection of reason, nor reason, by being resolved into common sense, will perhaps appear from the following remarks. 1. We are conscious, from internal feeling, that the energy of understanding which perceives intuitive truth, is different from that other energy which unites a conclusion with a first principle, by a gradual chain of intermediate relations. We believe the truth of an investigated conclusion, because we can assign a reason for our belief; we believe an intuitive principle, without being able to assign any other reason for our belief than this, that the law of our nature determines us to believe it; even as the law of our nature determines us to see a colour when presented to our open eyes at noon-day. 2. We cannot discern any *necessary* connection between reason and common sense: they are indeed generally connected; but we can conceive a being endued with the one who is destitute of the other. Nay, we often find, that this is in fact the case. In dreams, we sometimes reason without common sense. Through a defect of common sense, we adopt absurd principles; but supposing our principles true, our reasoning is often unexceptionable. The same thing may be observed in certain kinds of madness. A man who believes himself made of glass, shall yet reason very justly concerning the means of preserving his supposed brittleness from flaws and fractures. Nay, what is still more to the purpose, we sometimes meet with persons, whom it would be injurious to charge with insanity, who, though de-

fective in common sense, have yet, by conversing much with polemical writers, improved their reasoning faculty to such a degree, as to puzzle and put to silence those who are greatly their superiors in every other mental endowment. 3. This leads us to remark a third difference between these two faculties; namely, that the one is more in our power than the other. There are few faculties, either of our mind or body, more improvable by culture, than that of reasoning; whereas common sense, like other instincts, arrives at maturity with almost no care of ours. To teach the art of reasoning, or rather of wrangling, is easy; but it is impossible to teach common sense to one who wants it. You may make him remember a set of first principles, and say that he believes them, even as you may teach one born blind to speak intelligibly of colours and light; but neither to the one, nor to the other, can you by any means communicate the peculiar feeling which accompanies the operation of that faculty which nature has denied him. A man defective in common sense may acquire learning; he may even possess genius to a certain degree: but the defect of nature he never can supply: a peculiar modification of scepticism, or credulity, or levity, will to the end of his life distinguish him from other men.—It would evidence a deplorable degree of irrationality, if one could not perceive the truth of a geometrical axiom; such instances are uncommon: but the number of self-evident principles cognisable by man is very great, and more vigour of mind may be necessary to the perception of some, than to that of others. In this respect, therefore, there may be great diversities in the measure of common sense which different men enjoy.—Further, of two men, one of whom, though he acknowledges the truth of a first principle, is but little affected with it, and is easily in-



duced to become sceptical in regard to it; while the other has a vivid perception of its truth, is deeply affected with it, and firmly trusts to his own feelings without doubt or hesitation; I should not scruple to say, that the latter possesses the greater share of common sense: and in this respect too, I presume the minds of different men will be found to be very different. These diversities are, I think, to be referred, for the most part, to the original constitution of the mind, which it is not in the power of education to alter. I acknowledge, however, that common sense, like other instincts, may languish for want of exercise: as in the case of a person who, blinded by a false religion, has been all his days accustomed to distrust his own sentiments, and to receive his creed from the mouth of a priest. I acknowledge too, that freedom of inquiry does generally produce a juster, as well as more liberal, turn of thinking, than can ever be expected, while men account it damnable even to think differently from the established mode. But from this we can only infer, that common sense is improvable to a certain degree. Or perhaps this only proves, that the dictates of common sense are sometimes overruled, and rendered ineffectual, by the influence of sophistry and superstition operating upon a weak and diffident temper. 4. It deserves also to be remarked, that a distinction extremely similar to the present is acknowledged by the vulgar, who speak of mother-wit as something different from the deductions of reason, and the refinements of science. When puzzled with argument, they have recourse to their common sense, and acquiesce in it so steadily, as often to render all the arts of the logician ineffectual. 'I am confuted, but not convinced,' is an apology sometimes offered, when one has nothing to oppose to the arguments of the antagonist, but the original undis-

guised feelings of his own mind. This apology is indeed very inconsistent with the dignity of philosophic pride; which, taking for granted that nothing exceeds the limits of human capacity, professes to confute whatever it cannot believe, and, which is still more difficult, to believe whatever it cannot confute: but this apology may be perfectly consistent with sincerity and candor; and with that principle of which Pope says, that “though no science, it is fairly worth the seven.”

Thus far we have endeavoured to distinguish and ascertain the separate provinces of Reason and Common Sense. Their connection and mutual dependence, and the extent of their respective jurisdictions, we now proceed more particularly to investigate.—I ought perhaps to make an apology for these, and some other metaphorical expressions. And indeed it were to be wished, that in all matters of science, they could be laid aside; for the indiscreet use of metaphor has done great harm, by leading philosophers to mistake verbal analogies for real ones; and often, too, by giving plausibility to nonsense, as well as by disguising and perplexing very plain doctrines with an affected pomp of high-sounding words and gaudy images. But in the philosophy of the human mind, it is impossible to keep clear of metaphor; because we cannot speak intelligibly of immaterial things, without continual allusions to matter, and its qualities. All I need to say further on this head is, that I mean not by these metaphors to impose upon the reader; and that I shall do my utmost to prevent their imposing upon myself.

It is strange to observe, with what reluctance some people acknowledge the power of instinct. That man is governed by reason, and the brutes by instinct, is a favourite topic with certain philosophers: who like other froward children, spurn the



hand that leads them ; and desire, above all things, to be left to their own disposal. Were this boast founded in truth, it might be supposed to mean little more, than that man is governed by himself, and the brutes by their maker\*. But, luckily for man, it is not founded in truth, but in ignorance, inattention, and self-conceit. Our instincts, as well as our rational powers, are far superior, both in number and dignity, to those which the brutes enjoy : and it were well for us, on many occasions, if we laid our systems aside, and were more attentive in observing these impulses of nature in which reason has no part. Far be it from me to speak with disrespect of any of the gifts of God ; every work of his is good ; but the best things, when abused, may become pernicious. Reason is a noble faculty, and when kept within its proper sphere, and applied to useful purposes, proves a mean of exalting human creatures almost to the rank of superior beings. But this faculty has been much perverted, often to vile, and often to insignificant purposes ; sometimes chained like a slave or malefactor, and sometimes soaring in forbidden and unknown regions. No wonder then, if it has been frequently made the instrument of seducing and bewildering mankind, and of rendering philosophy contemptible.

In the science of body, glorious discoveries have been made by a right use of reason. When men are once satisfied to take things as they find them ; when they believe Nature upon her bare declaration, without suspecting her of any design to impose upon them ; when their utmost ambition is to be her servants and humble interpreters ; then, and not till then, will philosophy prosper. But of those who

\* And Reason raise o'er Instinct as you can,  
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis man.

*Pope's Essay on Man, Ep. 3. ver. 99:*

have applied themselves to the science of Human Nature, it may truly be said, (of many of them at least), that too much reasoning hath made them mad. Nature speaks to us by our external, as well as by our internal senses; it is strange, that we should believe her in the one case, and not in the other; it is most strange, that supposing her fallacious, we should think ourselves capable of detecting the cheat. Common Sense tells me, that the ground on which I stand is hard, material, and solid, and has a real, separate independent existence. Berkeley and Hume tell me, that I am imposed upon in this matter: for that the ground under my feet is really an idea in my mind; that its very essence consists in being perceived; and that the same instant it ceases to be perceived, it must also cease to exist: in a word, that *to be*, and *to be perceived*, when predicated of the ground, the sun, the starry heavens, or any corporeal object, signify precisely the same thing. Now if my common sense be mistaken, who shall ascertain and correct the mistake? Our reason, it is said. Are then the inferences of reason in this instance clearer, and more decisive, than the dictates of common sense? By no means. I still trust to my common sense as before; and I feel that I must do so. But supposing the inferences of the one faculty as clear and decisive as the dictates of the other, yet who will assure me, that my reason is less liable to mistake than my common sense? And if reason be mistaken, what shall we say? Is this mistake to be rectified by a second reasoning, as liable to mistake as the first?—In a word, we must deny the distinction between truth and falsehood, adopt universal scepticism, and wander without end from one maze of error and uncertainty to another; a state of mind so miserable, that Milton makes it one of the torments of the damned;—or else we must suppose, that one of these faculties is naturally



of higher authority than the other ; and that either reason ought to submit to common sense, or common sense to reason, whenever a variance happens between them.

It has been said, that every inquiry in philosophy ought to begin with doubt ;—that nothing is to be taken for granted, and nothing believed, without proof. If this be admitted, it must also be admitted, that reason is the ultimate judge of truth, to which common sense must continually act in subordination. But this I cannot admit ; because I am able to prove the contrary by the most incontestable evidence. I am able to prove, that “except we believe many things without proof, we never can believe any thing at all ; for that all sound reasoning must ultimately rest on the principles of common sense ; that is, on principles intuitively certain, or intuitively probable ; and, consequently, that common sense is the ultimate judge of truth, to which reason must continually act in subordination.” This I shall prove by a fair induction of particulars.

## CHAP. II.

*All reasoning terminates in first principles. All evidence ultimately intuitive. Common Sense the Standard of Truth to Man.*

IN this induction, we cannot comprehend all sorts of evidence, and modes of reasoning ; but we shall endeavour to investigate the origin of those\*

\* That the induction here given is sufficiently comprehensive, will appear from the following analysis.

All the objects of the human understanding may be reduced to two classes, viz. *Abstract Ideas* and *Things really existing*.

which are the most important, and of the most extensive influence in science, and common life ; beginning with the simplest and clearest, and advancing gradually to those which are more complicated, or less perspicuous.

## SECTION I.

### *Of Mathematical Reasoning.*

THE evidence that takes place in pure mathematics, produces the highest assurance and certainty in the mind of him who attends to, and understands it; for no principles are admitted into this science, but such as are either self-evident, or susceptible of demonstration. Should a man refuse to believe a demonstrated conclusion, the world

Of *Abstract Ideas and their Relations*, all our knowledge is certain, being founded on MATHEMATICAL EVIDENCE, (a); which comprehends, 1. Intuitive Evidence, and 2. The Evidence of strict demonstration.

We judge of *Things really existing*; either, 1. From our own experience; or 2. From the experience of other men.

1. Judging of *Real Existences* from our own experience, we attain either *Certainty* or *Probability*. Our knowledge is certain, when supported by the evidence, 1. Of SENSE EXTERNAL (b) and INTERNAL (c); 2. Of MEMORY (d); and 3. Of LEGITIMATE INFERENCES OF THE CAUSE FROM THE EFFECT (e). Our knowledge is *probable*, when from facts already experienced, we argue, 1. to facts OF THE SAME KIND (f) not experienced; and, 2. to facts OF A SIMILAR KIND (g) not experienced. This knowledge, though called *probable* often rises to moral certainty.

2. Judging of *Real Existences* from the experience of other men, we have the EVIDENCE OF THEIR TESTIMONY (h). The mode of understanding produced by that evidence is properly called *Faith*; and this faith sometimes amounts to *probable opinion*, and sometimes rises even to *absolute certainty*.

|              |              |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| (a) Sect. 1. | (b) Sect. 2. | (c) Sect. 3. | (d) Sect. 4. |
| (e) Sect. 5. | (f) Sect. 6. | (g) Sect. 7. | (h) Sect. 8. |



would impute his obstinacy, either to want of understanding, or to want of honesty: for every person of understanding feels, that by mathematical demonstration he must be convinced whether he will or not. There are two kinds of mathematical demonstration. The first is called *direct*; and takes place, when a conclusion is inferred from premises that render it necessarily true: and this perhaps is a more perfect, or at least a simpler, kind of proof, than than the other; but both are equally convincing. The other kind is called *indirect*, *apagogical*, or *ducens ad absurdum*: and takes place when, by supposing a proposition false, we are led into an absurdity, which there is no other way to avoid, than by supposing the proposition true. In this manner it is proved, that the proposition is not, and cannot be, false; in other words, that it is a certain truth. Every step in a mathematical proof either is self-evident, or must have been formerly demonstrated; and every demonstration does finally resolve itself into intuitive or self-evident principles, which it is impossible to prove, and equally impossible to disbelieve. These first principles constitute the foundation of mathematics: if you disprove them, you overturn the whole science; if you refuse to believe them, you cannot, consistently with such refusal, acquiesce in any mathematical truth whatsoever. But you may as well attempt to blow out the sun, as to disprove these principles: and if you say, that you do not believe them\*, you will be charged either with

\* Si quelque opiniastre les nie de la voix, on ne l'en scauroit empescher; mais cela ne luy est pas permis interieurement en son esprit, parce que sa lumiere naturelle y repugne, qui est la partie où se rapporte la demonstration et le syllogisme, et non aux paroles externes. Au moyen de quoy s'il se trouve quelqu'un qui ne les puisse entendre, cettuy-là est incapable de discipline.

falsehood or with folly; you may as well hold your hand in the fire, and say that you feel no pain. By the law of our nature, we must feel in the one case, and believe in the other; even as, by the same law, we must adhere to the earth, and cannot fall headlong to the clouds.

But who will pretend to prove a mathematical axiom, That a whole is greater than a part, or, That things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another? Every proof must be clearer and more evident than the thing to be proved. Can you then assume any more evident principle, from which the truth of these axioms may be consequently inferred? It is impossible; because they are already as evident as any thing can be\*. You

\* Different opinions have prevailed concerning the nature of these geometrical axioms. Some suppose, that an axiom is not self-evident, except it imply an identical proposition; that therefore this axiom, *It is impossible for the same thing, at the same time, to be and not to be*, is the only axiom that can properly be called intuitive; and that all those other propositions commonly called *axioms*, ought to be demonstrated by being resolved into this fundamental axiom. But if this could be done, which I fear is not possible, mathematical truth would not be one whit more certain than it is. Those other axioms produce absolute certainty, and produce it immediately, without any process of thought or reasoning that we can discover. And if the truth of a proposition be clearly and certainly perceived by all men without proof, and if no proof whatever could make it more clear or more certain, it seems captious not to allow that proposition the name of *Intuitive Axiom*.—Others suppose, that though the demonstration of mathematical axioms is not absolutely necessary, yet that these axioms are susceptible of demonstration, and ought to be demonstrated to those who require it. Dr Barrow is of this opinion. So is Apollonius; who, agreeably to it, has attempted a demonstration of this axiom, *That things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another*—But whatever account we make of these opinions, they affect not our doctrine. However far the demonstration of axioms may be carried, it must at last terminate in one principle of common sense, if not in many; which principle we must believe without proof whether we will or no.



may bring the matter to the test of the senses, by laying a few halfpence and farthings upon the table; but the evidence of sense is not more unquestionable, than that of abstract intuitive truth; and therefore the former evidence, though to one ignorant of the meaning of the terms, it might serve to explain and illustrate the latter, can never prove it. But not to rest any thing on the signification *we* affix to the word *proof*; and to remove every possibility of doubt as to this matter; let us suppose, that the evidence of external sense is more unquestionable than that of abstract intuitive truth, and that every intuitive principle in mathematics may thus be brought to the test of sense; and if we cannot call the evidence of sense a proof, let us call it a confirmation of the abstract principle: yet what do we gain by this method of illustration? We only discover, that the evidence of abstract intuitive truth is resolvable into, or may be illustrated by, the evidence of sense. And it will be seen in the next section, that we believe in the evidence of external sense, not because we can prove it to be true, but because the law of our nature determines us to believe in it without proof. So that in whatever way we view this subject, the point we mean to illustrate appears certain, namely, "That all mathematical truth is founded in certain first principles, which common sense or instinct compels us to believe without proof, whether we will or not."

Nor would the foundation of mathematics be in the least degree more stable, if these axioms did admit of proof, or were all resolvable into one primary axiom expressed by an identical proposition. As the case now stands, we are absolutely certain of their truth; and absolute certainty is all that demonstration can produce. We are convinced by a proof, because our constitution is such, that we must be convinced by it: and we believe a self-evi-

dent axiom, because our constitution is such that we must believe it. You ask, why I believe what is self-evident. I may as well ask, why you believe what is proved. Neither question admits of an answer; or rather, to both questions the answer is the same, namely, because I must believe it.

Whether our belief in these cases be agreeable to the eternal relations and fitnesses of things, and such as we should entertain if we were perfectly acquainted with all the laws of nature, is a question which no person of a sound mind can have any scruple to answer, with the fullest assurance, in the affirmative. Certain it is, our constitution is so framed, that we must believe to be true, and conformable to universal nature, that which is intimated to us, as such, by the original suggestions of our own understanding. If these are fallacious, it is the Deity who makes them so; and therefore we can never rectify, or even detect, the fallacy. But we cannot even suppose them fallacious, without violating our nature; nor, if we acknowledge a God, without the most absurd and most audacious impiety; for in this supposition it is implied that we suppose the Deity a deceiver. Nor can we, consistently with such a supposition, acknowledge any distinction between truth and falsehood, or believe that one inch is less than ten thousand miles, or even that we ourselves exist.

## SECT. II.

### *Of the Evidence of External Sense.*

ANOTHER class of truths producing conviction, and absolute certainty, are those which depend upon the evidence of the external senses; Hearing, Seeing, Touching, Tasting, and Smelling:



On this evidence is founded all our knowledge of external or material things; and therefore all conclusions in Natural Philosophy and all those prudential considerations which regard the preservation of our body, as it is liable to be affected by the sensible qualities of matter, must finally be resolved into this principle, That things are as our senses represent them. When I touch a stone, I am conscious of a certain sensation, which I call a *sensation of hardness*. But this sensation is not hardness itself, nor any thing like hardness: it is nothing more than a sensation or feeling in my mind; accompanied, however, with an irresistible belief, that this sensation is excited by the application of an external and hard substance to some part of my body. This belief as certainly accompanies the sensation, as the sensation accompanies the application of the stone to my organ of sense. I believe, with as much assurance, and as unavoidably, that the external thing exists, and is hard, as I believe that I receive, and am conscious of, the sensation of hardness; or, to speak more strictly, the sensation which by experience I know to be the sign of my touching a hard body\*. Now, why do I believe that this sensation is a real sensation, and really felt by me? Because my constitution is such that I must believe so. And why do I believe, in consequence of my receiving this sensation, that I touch an external object, really existing, material, and hard? The answer is the same: the matter is incapable of proof: I believe, because I must believe. Can I avoid believing, that I really am conscious of receiving this sensation? No. Can I avoid believing, that the external thing exists, and has a certain quality, which fits it, on being

\* See Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the human mind, chap. 5. sect. 3.

applied to my hand, to excite a certain feeling or sensation in my mind? No; I must believe this, whether I will or not. Nor could I divest myself of this belief, though my life and future happiness depended on the consequence.—To believe our senses, therefore, is according to the law of our nature; and we are prompted to this belief by instinct, or common sense. I am as certain, that at present I am in a house, and not in the open air; that I see by the light of the sun, and not by the light of a candle; that I feel the ground hard under my feet; and that I lean against a real material table,—as I can be of the truth of any geometrical axiom, or of any demonstrated conclusion; nay, I am as certain of all this as of my own existence. But I cannot prove by argument, that there is such a thing as matter in the world, or even that I myself exist: and yet I know as assuredly, that I do exist, and that there is a real material sun, and a real material world, with mountains, trees, houses, and animals, existing separately, and independently on me and my faculties; I say, I know all this with as much assurance of conviction, as the most irrefragable demonstration could produce. Is it unreasonable to believe in these cases *without* proof? Then, I affirm, it is equally unreasonable to believe in any case *with* proof. Our belief in either case is unavoidable, and according to the law of our nature; and if it be unreasonable to think, according to the law of our nature, it must be equally unreasonable to adhere to the earth, to be nourished with food, or to die when the head is separated from the body. It is indeed easy to affirm any thing, provided a man can reconcile himself to hypocrisy and falsehood. A man may affirm, that he sees with the soles of his feet, that he believes there is no material world, that he doubts of his own existence. He may as well say, that he believes one and two to be equal to six,



a part to be greater than a whole, a circle to be a triangle; and that it may be possible for the same thing, at the same time, to be and not to be.

But it is said, that our senses do often impose upon us; and that by means of reason we are enabled to detect the imposture, and to judge rightly even where our senses give us wrong information; that therefore our belief in the evidence of sense is not instinctive or intuitive, but such as may be either confuted or confirmed by reasoning. We shall acknowledge that our senses do often impose upon us: but a little attention will convince us, that reason, though it may be employed in correcting the present fallacious sensation, by referring it to a former sensation, received by us, or by other men, is not the ultimate judge in this matter; for that all such reasoning is resolvable into this principle of common sense, That things are what our external senses represent them. One instance will suffice at present for illustration of this point\*.

After having looked a moment at the sun, I see a black, or perhaps a luminous, circle swimming in the air, apparently at the distance of two or three feet from my eyes. That I see such a circle, is certain; that I believe I see it, is certain; that I believe its appearance to be owing to some cause, is also certain:—thus far there can be no imposture, and there is no supposition of any. Suppose me from this appearance to conclude, that a real, solid, tangible or visible round substance, of a black or yellow colour, is actually swimming in the air before me; in this I should be mistaken. How then come I to know that I am mistaken? I may know it in several ways. 1. I stretch out my hand to the place where the circle seems to be floating in the air; and having felt nothing, I am instantly convinced, that there is no tangible sub-

\* See part 2. chap. 1. sect. 2.

stance in that place. Is this conviction an inference of reason? No; it is a conviction arising from our innate propensity to believe, that things are as our senses represent them. By this innate or instinctive propensity I believe that what I touch exists; by the same propensity I believe, that where I touch nothing, there nothing tangible does exist. If in the present case I were suspicious of the veracity of my senses, I should neither believe nor disbelieve. 2. I turn my eyes towards the opposite quarter of the heavens; and having still observed the same circle floating before them, and knowing by experience, that the motion of bodies placed at a distance from me does not follow or depend on the motion of my body, I conclude that the appearance is owing, not to a real, external corporeal object, but to some disorder in my organ of sight. Here reasoning is employed: but where does it terminate? It terminates in experience, which I have acquired by means of my senses. But if I believed them fallacious, if I believed things to be otherwise than my senses represent them, I should never acquire experience at all. Or, 3. I apply, first to one man, then to another, and then to a third, who all assure me, that they perceive no such circle floating in the air, and at the same time inform me of the true cause of the appearance. I believe their declaration: either because I have had experience of their veracity, or because I have an innate propensity to credit testimony. To gain experience implies a belief in the evidence of sense, which reasoning cannot account for; and a propensity to credit testimony previous to experience or reasoning, is equally unaccountable\*.—So that, although we acknowledged some of our senses, in some instances, deceitful, our detection of the deceit,

\* See sect. 8. of this chapter.



whether by the evidence of our other senses, or by a retrospect to our past experience, or by our trusting to the testimony of other men, does still imply, that we do and must believe our senses previously to all reasoning\*.

A human creature born with a propensity to disbelieve his senses, would be as useless and helpless as if he wanted them. To his own preservation he could contribute nothing; and, after ages of being, would remain as destitute of knowledge and experience, as when he began to be.

Sometimes we seem to distrust the evidence of our senses, when in reality we only doubt whether we have that evidence. I may appeal to any man, if he were thoroughly convinced that he had really, when awake, seen and conversed with a ghost, whether any reasoning would convince him that it was a delusion. Reasoning might lead him to suspect that he had been dreaming, and therefore to doubt whether or not he had the evidence of sense; but if he were assured that he had that evidence, no arguments whatsoever would shake his belief.

### SECT. III.

#### *Of the Evidence of Internal Sense, or Consciousness.*

BY attending to what passes in my mind, I know not only that it exists, but also that it exerts certain powers of action and perception; which, on account either of a diversity in their objects, or of a difference in their manner of operating; I consider as separate and distinct faculties; and which I find it expedient to distinguish by different names,

that I may be able to speak of them so as to be understood. Thus I am conscious that at one time I exert memory, at another time imagination: sometimes I believe, sometimes I doubt: the performance of certain actions, and the indulgence of certain affections, is attended with an agreeable feeling of a peculiar kind which I call moral approbation; different actions and affections excite the opposite feeling, of moral disapprobation: to relieve distress, I feel to be meritorious and praise-worthy: to pick a pocket, I know to be blameable, and worthy of punishment: I am conscious that some actions are in my power, and that others are not; that when I neglect to do what I ought to do, and can do, I deserve to be punished; and that when I act necessarily, or, upon unavoidable and irresistible compulsion, I deserve neither punishment nor blame. Of all these sentiments I am as conscious, and as certain, as of my own existence. I cannot prove that I feel them, neither to myself, nor to others: but that I do really feel them, is as evident to me as demonstration could make it. I cannot prove, in regard to my moral feelings, that they are conformable to any extrinsic and eternal relation of things; but I know that my constitution necessarily determines me to believe them just and genuine, even as it determines me to believe that I myself exist, and that things are as my external senses represent them. And a sophister could no more prove to my conviction, that these feelings are fallacious, or that I have no such feelings, than he could prove to my conviction, that two and two may be equal to five, or that my friend is as much present with me when I think of him at a thousand miles distance, as when I sit and converse with him in the same chamber. An expert logician might perhaps puzzle me with words, and propose difficulties I could not solve: but he might as well at-



tempt to convince me, that I do not exist, as that I do not feel what I am conscious I do feel. And if he could induce me to suspect that I may possibly be mistaken, what standard of truth could he propose to me, more evident, and of higher authority, than my own feelings? Shall I believe his testimony, and disbelieve my own sensations? Shall I admit his reasons, because I cannot confute them, although common sense tells me they are false? Shall I suffer the ambiguities of artificial language to prevail against the clear, the intelligible, the irresistible voice of nature?—Am I to judge of the colouring of a flower by moonshine, or by the light of the sun? Or, because I cannot, by candle-light, distinguish green from blue, shall I therefore infer, that green and blue are the same?

We cannot disbelieve the evidence of internal sense, without offering violence to our nature. And if we be led into such disbelief, or distrust, by the sophistry of pretended philosophers, we act just as wisely as a mariner would do, who should suffer himself to be persuaded that the pole-star is continually changing its place, but that the wind always blows from the same quarter. Common sense, or instinct, which prompts men to trust to their own feelings, hath in all ages continued the same: but the interests, pursuits, and abilities of philosophers are susceptible of endless variety; and their theories vary accordingly.

Let it not be thought, that these objects and faculties of internal sensation are things too evanescent to be attended to, or that their evidence is too weak to produce a steady and well-grounded conviction. They are more necessary to our happiness than even the powers and objects of external sense; yea, they are no less necessary to our existence. What can be of greater consequence to man, than his moral sentiments, his reason, his memory, his imagination?

What more interesting, than to know, whether his notions of duty and of truth be the dictates of his nature, that is the voice of God, or the positive institutions of men? What is it to which a wise man will pay more attention, than to his reason and conscience, those divine monitors, by which he is to judge even of religion itself, and which he is not at liberty to disobey, though an angel from heaven should command him? The generality of mankind, however ignorant of the received distinctions and explications of their internal powers, do yet by their conduct declare, that they feel their influence, and acknowledge their authenticity. Every instance of their being governed by a principle of moral obligation, is a proof of this. They believe an action to be lawful in the sight of God, when they are conscious of a sentiment of lawfulness attending the performance of it: they believe a certain mode of conduct to be incumbent on them in certain circumstances, because a notion of duty arises in their mind, when they contemplate that conduct in relation to those circumstances.—“I ought to be grateful for a favour received. Why? Because my conscience tells me so. How do you know that you ought to do that of which your conscience enjoins the performance? I can give no further reason for it; but I *feel* that such is my duty.” Here the investigation must stop; or, if carried a little further it must return to this point:—“I know that I ought to do what my conscience enjoins, because God is the author of my constitution; and I obey His will, when I act according to the principles of my constitution. Why do you obey the will of God? Because it is my duty. How know you that? Because my conscience tells me so.”

If a man were sceptical in this matter, it would not be in the power of argument to cure him. Such a man could not be said to have any moral principle.



distinct from the hope of reward, the fear of punishment, or the force of custom. But that there is in human nature a moral principle distinct from those motives, has been felt and acknowledged by men of all ages and nations; and indeed was never denied or doubted, except by a few metaphysicians, who, through want either of sense or of honesty, found themselves disposed to deny the existence or question the authenticity, of our moral feelings. In the celebrated dispute concerning liberty and necessity, the advocates for the latter have either maintained, that we have no sense of moral liberty; or, granting that we have such a sense, have endeavoured to prove it deceitful. Now, if we be conscious, that we have a sense of moral liberty, it is certainly as absurd to argue against the existence of that sense, as against the reality of any other matter of fact. And if the real existence of that sense be acknowledged, it cannot be proved to be deceitful by any arguments which may not also be applied to prove every power of our nature deceitful, and consequently, to show that man ought not to believe any thing at all. But more of this afterwards.

We have no other direct evidence than this of consciousness, or internal sensation, for the existence and identity of our own soul\*. I exist;—I

\* I say, *direct* evidence. But there are not wanting other irrefragable, though indirect, evidences of the existence of the human soul. Such is that which results from a comparison of the known qualities of matter with the phenomena of animal motion and thought. The further we carry our inquiries into matter, the more we are convinced of its incapacity to begin motion. And as to thought, and its several modes, if we think that they *might* be produced by any possible configuration and arrangement of the minute particles of matter, we form a supposition as arbitrary, as little warranted by experience or evidence of any kind, and as contrary to the rules that determine us in all our rational conjectures, as if we were

am the same being to-day I was yesterday, and twenty years ago;—this principle, or being, within me, that thinks and acts, is one permanent and individual principle, distinct from all other princi-

to suppose, that diamonds *might* be produced from the smoke of a candle, or that men *might* grow like mushrooms out of the earth. There must then, in all animals, and especially in man, be a principle, not only distinct and different from body, but in some respects of a quite contrary nature. To ask, whether the deity, without uniting body with spirit, could create thinking matter, is just such a question, as, whether he could create a being essentially active and essentially inactive, capable of beginning motion, and at the same time incapable of beginning motion: questions, which, if we allow experience to be a rational ground of knowledge, we need not scruple to answer in the negative. For these questions, according to the best lights that our rational faculties can afford, seem to us to refer to the production of an effect as truly impossible, as the creation of round squareness, hot cold, black whiteness, or true falsehood.

Yet I am inclined to think, it is not by this argument that the generality of mankind are led to acknowledge the existence of their own minds. An evidence more direct, much more obvious, and not less convincing, every man discovers in the instinctive suggestions of nature. We perceive the existence of our souls by intuition; and this I believe is the only way in which the vulgar perceive it. But their conviction is not on that account the weaker; on the contrary, they would account the man mad who should seem to entertain any doubts on this subject.

One of the first thoughts that occur to Milton's Adam, when "new waked from soundest sleep," is to inquire after the cause of his existence:

"Thou sun ,said I, fair light!  
And thou enlighten'd earth, so fresh and gay!  
Ye hills, and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,  
And, ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,  
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here:  
Not of myself; by some great Maker then,  
In goodness and in power pre-eminent.  
Tell me, how I may know him, how adore,  
From whom I have, that thus I move and live,  
And feel that I am happier than know."

*Paradise Lost*, viii. 273.



ples, beings, or things;—these are dictates of internal sensation natural to man, and universally acknowledged: and they are of so great importance, that while we doubt of their truth, we can hardly be interested in any thing else whatsoever. If I were to believe with Mr. Hume, and some others, that my mind is perpetually changing, so as to become every different moment a different thing, the remembrance of past, or the anticipation of future good or evil, could give me neither pleasure nor pain; yea, though I were to believe, that cruel death would certainly overtake me within an hour, I should be no more concerned, than if I were told, that a certain elephant, three thousand years hence, would be sacrificed on the top of Mount Atlas. To a man who doubts the individuality or identity of his own mind, virtue, truth, religion, good and evil, hope and fear, are absolutely nothing.

Metaphysicians have taken some pains to confound our notions on the subject of identity; and, by establishing the currency of certain ambiguous phrases have succeeded so well, that it is now hardly possible for us to explain these dictates of our nature according to common sense and com-

Of the reality of his own life, motion, and existence, it is observable that he makes no question; and indeed it would have been strange if he had. But Dryden, in his opera, called *The state of innocence*, would needs attempt an improvement on this passage; and to make surer work, obliges Adam to prove his existence by argument, before he allows him to enter upon any other inquiry.

“What am I? or from whence?—For that I am  
I know, *because I think*: but whence I came,  
Or how this frame of mine began to be,  
What other being can disclose to me?”

*Act 2. scene 1.*

Dryden, it seems, had read Des Cartes; but Milton had studied nature: Accordingly Dryden speaks like a metaphysician, Milton like a poet and philosopher.

mon experience, in such language as shall be liable to no exception. The misfortune is, that many of the words we must use, though extremely well understood, are either too simple or too complex in their meaning, to admit a logical definition; so that the caviller is never at a loss for an evasive reply to any thing we may advance. But I will take it upon me to affirm, that there are hardly any human notions more clearly, or more universally understood, than those we entertain concerning the identity both of ourselves and of other things, however difficult we may sometimes find it to express those notions in proper words. And I will also venture to affirm, that the sentiments of the generality of mankind on this head are grounded on such evidence, that he who refuses to be convinced by it, acts irrationally, and cannot, consistently with such refusal, believe any thing.

1. The existence of our own mind, as something different and distinct from the body, is universally acknowledged. I say universally; having never heard of any nation of men upon earth, who did not, in their conversation and behaviour, show, by the plainest signs, that they made this distinction. Nay, so strongly are mankind impressed with it, that the rudest barbarians, by their incantations, their funeral solemnities, their traditions concerning invisible beings, and their hopes and opinions of a future state seem to declare, that to the existence of the soul the body is not, in their opinion necessary. All philosophers, a few Epicureans and Pyrrhonists excepted, have acknowledged the existence of the soul, as one of the first and most unexceptionable principles of human science. Now whence could a notion so universal arise? Let us examine our own minds, and we shall find, that it could arise from nothing but consciousness, a certain irresistible persuasion, that we have a soul dis-



tinct from the body. The evidence of this notion is intuitive; it is the evidence of internal sense. Reasoning can neither prove nor disprove it. Des Cartes, and his disciple Malebranche, acknowledge, that the existence of the human soul must be believed by all men, even by those who can bring themselves to doubt of every thing else.

Mr. Simon Browne\*, a learned and pious clergyman of the last age, is perhaps the only person on record of whom there is reason to think, that he seriously disbelieved the existence of his own soul. He imagined, that in consequence of an extraordinary interposition of divine power, his rational soul was gradually annihilated, and that nothing was now left him, but a principle of animal life, which he held in common with the brutes. But wherever the story of this excellent person is known, his unhappy mistake will be imputed to madness, and to a depravation of intellect, as real, and as extraordinary, as if he had disbelieved the existence of his body, or the axioms of mathematics.

2. That the thinking principle, which we believe to be within us, continues the same through life, is equally self-evident, and equally agreeable to the universal consent of mankind. If a man were to speak and act in the evening, as if he believed himself to have become a different person since the morning, the whole world would pronounce him in a state of insanity. Were we to attempt to disbelieve our own indentity, we should labour in vain; we could as easily bring ourselves to believe, that it is possible for the same thing to be and not to be. But there is no reason to think, that this attempt was ever made by any man, not even by Mr. Hume himself; though that author,

\* See his affecting story in the *Adventurer*, vol. 3. No. 88.

in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, has asserted, yea, and proved too, (according to his notions of proof,) that the human soul is perpetually changing; being nothing but “a bundle of perceptions, that succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are (as he chooses to express it) in a perpetual flux\*.” He might as easily, and as decisively, with equal credit to his own understanding, and with equal advantage to the reader, by a method of reasoning no less philosophical, and with the same degree of discretion in the use of words, have attacked the axioms of mathematics, and produced a formal and serious confutation of them. In explaining the evidence on which we believe our own identity, it is not necessary that I should here examine his arguments against that belief; first, because the point in question is self-evident; and therefore all reasoning on the other side unphilosophical and irrational; and, secondly, because I shall afterwards prove that some of Mr. Hume’s first principles are inconceivable and impossible; and that this very notion of his, concerning identity, when fairly stated, is absurd and self-contradictory.

It has been asked, how we can pretend to have full evidence of our identity, when of identity itself we are so far from having a distinct notion, that we cannot define it. It might with as good reason be asked, how we come to believe that two and two are equal to four, or that a circle is different from a triangle, if we cannot define either equality or diversity:—why we believe in our own existence, since we cannot define existence:—why, in a word, the vulgar believe any thing at all, since they know nothing about the rules of definition, and hardly ever attempt it. In fact, we have numberless ideas that admit not of definition, and yet con-

\* *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 438, &c.



cerning which we may argue, and believe, and know, with the utmost clearness and certainty. To define heat or cold, identity or diversity, red, or white, an ox or an ass, would puzzle all the logicians on earth; yet nothing can be clearer, or more certain, than many of our judgments concerning those objects. The rudest of the vulgar know most perfectly what they mean, when they say, three months ago I was at such a town, and have ever since been at home: and the conviction they have of the truth of this proposition is founded on the best of evidence, namely, on that of internal sense; in which all men, by the law of their nature, do and must implicitly believe.

It has been asked, whether this continued consciousness of our being always the same, does not constitute our sameness or identity. No more, I should answer, than our perception of truth, light, or cold, is the efficient cause of truth, light, or cold. Our identity is perceived by consciousness; but consciousness is as different from identity, as the understanding is different from truth, as past events are different from memory, as colours from the power of seeing. Consciousness of identity is so far from constituting identity, that it presupposes it. An animal might continue the same being, and yet not be conscious of its identity; which is probably the case with many of the brute creation; nay, which is often the case with man himself. When we sleep without dreaming, or fall into a fainting fit\*, or rave in a fever, and often too in

\* The following case, which M. Crouzaz gave in to the Academy of Sciences, is the most extraordinary instance of interrupted consciousness I have ever heard of. A nobleman of Lausanne, as he was giving orders to a servant, suddenly lost his speech and all his senses. Different remedies were tried without effect for six months; during all which time he appeared to be in a deep sleep, or deliquium, with various symptoms at different periods, which are particularly specified in the narration.

our ordinary dreams, we lose all sense of our identity, and yet never conceive that our identity has suffered any interruption or change: the moment we awake or recover, we are conscious that we are the same individual beings we were before.

Many doubts and difficulties have been started about our manner of conceiving identity of person under a change of substance. Plutarch tells us, that in the time of Demetrius Phalereus, the Athenians still preserved the custom of sending every year to Delos the same galley which, about a thousand years before, had brought Theseus and his company from Crete; and that it then used to be a question in the schools, how this could be the same vessel, when every part of its materials had been changed oftener than once\*. It is asked, how the tree can be accounted the same, when, from a plant of an inch long, it has grown to the height of fifty feet; and how identity can be as-

At last, after some chirurgical operations, at the end of six months his speech and senses were suddenly restored. When he recovered, the servant to whom he had been giving orders when he was first seized with the distemper, happening to be in the room, he asked whether he had executed his commission; not being sensible, it seems, that any interval of time, except, perhaps a very short one, had elapsed during his illness. He lived ten years after, and died of another disease. See *L' Histoire de l' Academie Royale des Sciences, pour l' année, 1719, p. 28.* Van Swieten also relates this story in his commentaries on Boerhaave's Aphorisms, under the head *Apoplexy*. I mention it chiefly with a view to the reader's amusement; he may consider the evidence, and believe or disbelieve as he pleases. But that consciousness may be interrupted by a total deliquium, without any change in our notions of our own identity, I know by my own experience. I am therefore fully persuaded, that the identity of this substance, which I call my soul, may continue even when I am unconscious of it; and if for a shorter space, why not for a longer?

\* Plutarch, in Theseo. Plato, in Phædone.



cribed to the human body, since its parts are continually changing, so that not one particle of the body I now have, belonged to the body I had twenty years ago.

It were well, if metaphysicians would think more and speak less on these subjects: they would then find, that the difficulties so much complained of are rather verbal than real. Was there a single Athenian, who did not know in what respects the galley of Theseus continued the same, and in what respects it was changed? It was the same in respect of its name, its destination, its shape perhaps, and size, and some other particulars; in respect of its substance, it was altogether different. And when one party in the schools maintained, that it was the same, and the other, that it was not the same, all the difference between them was this, that the one used the word *same* in one sense, and the other in another.

The identity of vegetables is as easily conceived. No man imagines, that the plant of an inch long is the same in substance with the tree of fifty feet. The latter is by the vulgar supposed to retain all the substance of the former, but with the addition of an immense quantity of adventitious matter. Thus far, and no further, do they suppose the substance of the tree to continue the same. They call it, however the same tree; and the same it is, in many respects, which to every person of common sense are obvious enough, though not easily expressed in unexceptionable language.

Of the changes made in the human body by attrition, the vulgar have no notion. They believe the substance of a full-grown body to continue the same, notwithstanding its being sometimes fatter, and sometimes leaner; even as they suppose the substance of a wall to be the same before and after it is plaistered, or painted. They therefore do

not ascribe to it identity of person, and diversity of substance, but a real and proper identity both of substance and person. Of the identity of the body while increasing in stature, they conceive, nearly in the same way, as of the identity of vegetables: they know in what respects it continues the same, and in what respects it becomes different; there is no confusion in their notions; they never suppose it to be different in those respects in which they know it to be the same.

When philosophers speak of the identity of the human body, they must mean, not that its substance is the same, for this they say is perpetually changing; but that it is the same, in respect of its having been all along animated with the same vital and thinking principle, distinguished by the same name, marked with the same or similar features, placed in the same relations of life, &c.—It must be obvious to the intelligent reader, that the difficulties attending this subject arise not from any ambiguity or intricacy in our notions or judgments, for these are extremely clear, but from our way of expressing them: the particulars in which an object continues the same, are often so blended with those in which it has become different, that we cannot find proper words for marking the distinction, and therefore must have recourse to tedious and obscure circumlocutions.

But whatever judgments we form of the identity of corporeal objects; we cannot from them draw any inference concerning the identity of our mind. We cannot ascribe extension or solidity to the soul, far less any increase or diminution of solid or extended parts. Here, therefore, there is no ground for distinguishing diversity of substance from identity of person. Our soul is the very same being now it was yesterday, last year, twenty years ago. This is a dictate of common sense, an intuiti-



tive truth, which all mankind, by the law of their nature do and must believe, and the contrary of which is inconceivable. We have perhaps changed many of our principles: we may have acquired many new ideas and notions, and lost many of those we once had; but that the substance, essence, or personality, of the soul, has suffered any change, increase, or diminution, we never have supposed, nor can suppose. New faculties have perhaps appeared, with which we were formerly unacquainted; but these we cannot conceive to have affected the identity of the soul, any more than learning to write, or to play on a musical instrument, is conceived to affect the identity of the hand; or than the perception of harmony the first time one hears music, is conceived to affect the identity of the ear\*.

But if we perceive our identity by consciousness, and if the acts of consciousness by which we perceive it be interrupted, how can we know that our identity is not interrupted? I answer, The law of our nature determines us, whether we will or not, to believe that we continue the same thinking be-

\* I beg leave to quote a few lines from an excellent poem, written by an author, whose genius and virtue were an honour to his country, and to human nature:

“Am I but what I seem, mere flesh and blood?  
A branching channel, and a mazy flood?  
The purple stream, that through my vessels glides,  
Dull and unconscious flows like common tides.  
The pipes, through which the circling juices stray,  
Are not that thinking I, no more than they.  
This frame compacted with transcendent skill,  
Of moving joints obedient to my will.  
Nursed from the fruitful glebe like yonder tree,  
Waxes and wastes: I call it MINE not ME.  
New matter still the mouldering mass sustains;  
The mansion changed, the tenant still remains,  
And, from the fleeting stream repair’d by food,  
Distinct, as is the swimmer from the flood.”

ARBUTHNOT. See *Dodsley's Collection*, vol. 1. p. 180.

ings. The interruption of consciousness, whether more or less frequent, makes no change in this belief. My perception of the visible creation is every moment interrupted by the winking of my eyes. Am I therefore to believe, that the visible universe, which I this moment perceive, is not the same with the visible universe I perceived last moment? Then must I also believe, that the existence of the universe depends on the motion of my eye-lids; and that the muscles which move them have the power of creating and annihilating worlds.

To conclude: That our soul exists, and continues through life the same individual being, is a dictate of common sense; a truth which the law of our nature renders it impossible for us to disbelieve; and in regard to which, we cannot suppose ourselves in an error, without supposing our faculties fallacious, and consequently disclaiming all conviction, and all certainty, and disavowing the distinction between truth and falsehood.

#### SECT. IV.

##### *Of the Evidence of Memory.*

THE evidence of memory commands our belief as effectually as that of sense. I cannot possibly doubt, with regard to any of my transactions of yesterday which I now remember, whether I performed them or not. That I dined to-day, and was in bed last night, is as certain to me, as that I at present see the colour of this paper. If we had no memory, knowledge and experience would be impossible; and if we had any tendency to distrust our memory, knowledge and experience would be of as little use in directing our conduct and sentiments, as our dreams now are. Sometimes we



doubt, whether in a particular case we exert memory or imagination; and our belief is suspended accordingly: but no sooner do we become conscious, that we *remember*, than conviction instantly takes place; we say, I am certain it was so, for now I remember I was an eye-witness.

But who is it that teaches the child to believe, that yesterday he was punished, because he remembers to have been punished yesterday? Or, by what argument will you convince him, that, notwithstanding his remembrance, he ought not to believe that he was punished yesterday, because memory is fallacious? The matter depends not on education or reasoning. We trust to the evidence of memory, because we cannot help trusting to it. The same Providence that endued us with memory, without any care of ours, endued us also with an instinctive propensity to believe in it, previously to all reasoning and experience. Nay, all reasoning supposes the testimony of memory to be authentic: for, without trusting implicitly to this testimony, no train of reasoning could be prosecuted; we could never be convinced, that the conclusion is fair, if we did not *remember* the several steps of the argument, and if we were not certain that this remembrance is not fallacious.

The diversities of memory in different men are very remarkable; and in the same man the remembrance of some things is more lasting, and more lively than that of others. Some of the ideas of memory seem to decay gradually by length of time; so that there may be some things which I distinctly remembered seven years ago, but which at present I remember very imperfectly, and which in seven years more (if I live so long) I shall have utterly forgotten. Hence some have been led to think, that the evidence of memory decays gradually, from absolute certainty, through all the degrees of

probability, down to that suspense of judgment which we call *doubt*. They seem to have imagined, that the vivacity of the idea is in some sort necessary to the establishment of belief. Nay, one author\* has gone so far as to say, that belief is nothing else but this vivacity of ideas; as if we never believed what we have no lively conception of, nor doubted of any thing of which we have a lively conception. But this doctrine is so absurd, that it hardly deserves a serious confutation. I have a much more lively idea of Don Quixote than of the present king of Prussia; and yet I believe that the latter does exist and that the former never did. When I was a school-boy, I read an abridgment of the history of Robinson Crusoe, and believed every word of it; since I grew up, I have read that ingenious work at large, and consequently have a much livelier conception of it than before; yet now I believe the whole to be a fiction. Some months ago I read *the Treatise of Human Nature*, and have at present a pretty clear remembrance of its contents; but I shall probably forget the greater part in a short time. When this happens, I ought not, according to Mr. Hume's theory, to believe that I ever read it. As long, however, as my faculties remain unimpaired, I fear I shall hardly be able to bring myself to this pitch of scepticism. No, no; I shall ever have good reason to remember my having read that book, however imperfect my remembrance may be, and however little ground I may have to congratulate myself upon my acquaintance with it.

The vivacity of a perception does not seem necessary to our belief of the existence of the thing perceived. I see a town afar off; its visible magnitude is not more than an inch square, and therefore my perception of it is neither lively nor distinct; and

\* *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 1.



yet I as certainly believe that town to exist, as if I were in the centre of it. I see an object in motion on the top of yonder hill; I cannot discern whether it be a man, or a horse, or both; I therefore exert no belief in regard to the class or species of objects to which it belongs, but I believe with as much assurance that it exists, as if I saw it distinctly in all its parts and dimensions. We have never any doubt of the existence of an object so long as we are sure that we perceive it by our senses, whether the perception be strong or weak, distinct or confused; but whenever we begin to doubt, whether the object be perceived by our senses, or whether we only imagine that we perceive it, then we likewise begin to doubt of its existence.

These observations are applicable to memory. I saw a certain object some years ago; my remembrance of it is less distinct now than it was the day after I saw it; but I believe the evidence of my memory as much at present as I did then, in regard to all the parts of it which I now am conscious that I remember. Let a past event be ever so remote in time, if I am conscious that I remember it, I still believe, with equal assurance, that this event did once take place. For what is memory, but a consciousness of our having formerly done or perceived something? And if it be true, that something is perceived or done at this present moment, it will always be true, that at this moment that thing was perceived or done. The evidence of memory does not decay in proportion as the ideas of memory become less lively; as long as we are conscious that we *remember*, so long will the evidence attending that remembrance produce absolute certainty; and absolute certainty admits not of degrees. Indeed, as was already observed, when remembrance becomes so obscure, that we are at a loss to determine whether we *remember* or only *imagine* an event,—in this case

belief will be suspended till we become certain whether we remember or not; whenever we become certain that we do remember, conviction instantly arises.

Some have supposed that the evidence of memory is liable to become uncertain, because we are not well enough acquainted with the difference between memory and imagination, to be able at all times to determine, whether the one or the other be exerted in regard to the events or facts we may have occasion to contemplate. “ You say, that while you only imagine an event, you neither believe nor disbelieve the existence or reality of it: but that as soon as you become conscious that you remember it, you instantly believe it to have been real. You must then know with certainty the difference between memory and imagination, and be able to tell by what marks you distinguish the operations of the former from those of the latter. If you cannot do this, you may mistake the one for the other, and think that you *imagine* when you really *remember*, and that you *remember* when you only *imagine*. That belief, therefore, must be very precarious and uncertain, which is built upon the evidence of memory, since this evidence is so apt to be confounded with the visionary exhibitions of imagination, which, by your own acknowledgment, can never constitute a foundation for true rational belief.” This is an objection, according to the metaphysical mode, which, without consulting experience, is satisfied if a few plausible words can be put together in the form of an argument: but this objection will have no credit with those who acknowledge ultimate instinctive principles of conviction, and who have more faith in their own feelings than in the subtleties of logic.



It is certain the vulgar are not able to give a satisfactory account of the difference between memory and imagination; even philosophers have not always succeeded in their attempts to illustrate this point. Mr. Hume tells us, that ideas of memory are distinguished from those of imagination by the superior vivacity of the former\*. This may sometimes, but cannot always, be true: for ideas of imagination are often mistaken for objects of sense; ideas of memory never. The former, therefore, must often be more lively than the latter; for, according to Mr. Hume's own account, all ideas are weaker than impressions, or informations of sense†. Dreaming persons, lunatics, stage-players, enthusiasts, and all who are agitated by fear, or other violent passions, are apt to mistake ideas of imagination for real things, and the perception of those ideas for real sensation. And the same thing is often experienced by persons of strong fancy, and great sensibility of temper, at a time when they are not troubled with any fits of irrationality or violent passions.

But whatever difficulty we may find in defining or describing memory, so as to distinguish it from imagination, we are never at any loss about our own meaning, when we speak of remembering and of imagining. We all know what it is to remember, and what it is to imagine; a retrospect to former experience always attends the exertions of memory; but those of imagination are not attended with any such retrospect. “I remember to have seen a lion, and I can imagine an elephant or centaur, which I have never seen:”—Every body who uses these words knows very well what they mean, whether

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 153.

† Ibid. p. 41.

he be able to explain his meaning by other words or not. The truth is, that when we remember, we generally know that we remember; when we imagine, we generally know that we imagine ‡: such is our constitution. We therefore do not suppose the evidence of memory uncertain, notwithstanding that we may be at a loss to explain the difference between that faculty and imagination: this difference is perfectly known to every man by experience, though perhaps no man can fully express it in words. There are many things very familiar to us, which we have no words to express. I cannot describe or define, either a red colour, which I know to be a simple object, or a white colour, which I know to be a composition of seven colours: but will any one hence infer, that I am ignorant of their difference, so as not to know, when I look on ermine, whether it be white or red? Let it not then be said, that because we cannot define memory and imagination, therefore we are ignorant of their difference: every person of a sound mind, knows their difference, and can with certainty determine, when it is he exerts the one, and when it is he exerts the other.

## SECT. V.

### *Of Reasoning from the Effect to the Cause.*

I LEFT my chamber an hour ago, and now at my return find a book on the table, the size, and binding, and contents of which are so remarkable,

‡ In dreams indeed this is not the case; but the delusions of dreaming, notwithstanding our frequent experience of them, are never supposed to affect in the least degree either the veracity of our faculties, or the certainty of our knowledge. See below, Part II. Chap. 2. Sect. 2.



that I am certain it was not here when I went out ; and that I never saw it before. I ask, who brought this book ; and am told, that no body has entered my apartment since I left it. That, say I, is *impossible*. I make a more particular inquiry ; and a servant, in whose veracity I can confide, assures me, that he has had his eye on my chamber-door the whole day, and that no person has entered it but myself only. Then, say I, the person who brought this book must have come in by the window or the chimney ; for it is *impossible* that this book could have come hither of itself. The servant bids me remember, that my chimney is too narrow to admit any human creature, and that the window is secured on the inside in such a manner that it cannot be opened from without. I examine the walls ; it is evident no breach has been made ; and there is but one door to the apartment. What shall I think ? If the servant's report be true, and if the book have not been brought by any visible agent, it must have come in a miraculous manner, by the interposition of some invisible cause ; for still I must repeat, that without some cause it *could not possibly* have come hither.

Let the reader consider the case, and deliberate with himself whether I think irrationally, on this occasion, or express myself too strongly, when I speak of the *impossibility* of a book appearing in my chamber without some cause of its appearance, either visible or invisible. I would not willingly refer such a phenomenon to a miracle ; but still a miracle is possible ; whereas it is absolutely impossible that this could have happened without a cause ; at least it seems to me to be as real an impossibility, as that a part should be greater than the whole, or that things equal to one and the same thing should be unequal to one another. And I presume the reader will be of my opinion ; for, in all

my intercourse with others, and after a careful examination of my own mind, I have never found any reason to think, that it is possible for a human, or for a rational creature, to conceive a thing beginning to exist, and proceeding from no cause.

I pronounce it therefore to be an axiom, clear, certain, and undeniable, That “whatever beginneth to exist, proceedeth from some cause.” I cannot bring myself to think, that the reverse of any geometrical axiom is more absurd than the reverse of this; and therefore I am as certain of the truth of this, as I can be of the truth of the other; and cannot, without contradicting myself, and doing violence to my nature, even attempt to believe otherwise.

Whether this maxim be intuitive or demonstrable, may perhaps admit of some dispute; but the determination of that point will not in the least affect the truth of the maxim. If it be demonstrable, we can then assign a reason for our belief of it: if it be intuitive, it is on the same footing with other intuitive axioms; that is, we believe it, because the law of our nature renders it impossible for us to disbelieve it.

In proof of this maxim it has been said, that nothing can produce itself. But this truth is not more evident than the truth to be proved, and therefore is no proof at all. Nay, this last proposition seems to be only a different, and less proper, way of expressing the same thing:—Nothing can produce itself; that is, every thing produced, must be produced by some other thing; that is, every effect must proceed from a cause and that is, (for all effects being posterior to their causes, must necessarily have a beginning “every thing beginning to exist proceeds from some cause.” Other arguments have been offered in proof of this maxim, which I think are



sufficiently confuted by Mr. Hume, in his treatise of Human Nature\*. This maxim therefore he affirms and I allow, to be not demonstrably certain. But he further affirms, that it is not intuitively certain; in which I cannot agree with him. "All certainty," says he, "arises from the comparison of ideas, and from the discovery of such relations as are unalterable so long as the ideas continue the same: but the only relations† of this kind are resemblance, proportion in quantity and number, degrees of any quality, and contrariety; none of which is implied in the maxim, *Whatever begins to exist, proceeds from some cause*:—that maxim therefore is not intuitively certain."—This argument, if it prove any thing at all, would prove, that the maxim is not even certain; for we are here told, that it has not that character or quality from which all certainty arises.

But if I mistake not, both the premises of this syllogism are false. In the first place, I cannot admit, that all certainty arises from a comparison of ideas. I am certain of the existence of myself and of the other things that affect my senses; I am certain, that "whatever is, is;" and yet I cannot conceive, that any comparison of ideas is necessary to produce these convictions in my mind. Perhaps I cannot speak of them without using words expressive of relation; but the simple act or perception of the understanding by which I am conscious of them, implies not any comparison that I can discover. If it did, then the simplest intuitive truth

\* Book 1. part 3. sect. 3.

† There are, according to Mr. Hume, seven different kinds of philosophical relation, to wit, Resemblance, Identity, Relations of time and place, Proportion in quantity or number, Degrees in any common quality, Contrariety, and Causation. And by the word *Relation* he here means that particular circumstance in which we may think proper to compare ideas. See *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 32.



requires proof, or illustration at least, before it can be acknowledged as truth by the mind; which I presume will not be found warranted by experience. Whether others are conscious of making such a comparison, before they yield assent to the simplest intuitive truth, I know not; but this I know, that my mind is often conscious of certainty where no such comparison has been made by me. I acknowledge, indeed, that no certain truth can become an object of science, till it be expressed in words; that, if expressed in words, it must assume the form of a proposition; and that every proposition, being either affirmative or negative, must imply a comparison of the thing or subject, with that quality or circumstance which is affirmed or denied, to belong to, or agree with it: and therefore I acknowledge, that in science, all certainty may be said to arise from a comparison of ideas. But the generality of mankind believe many things as certain, which they never thought of expressing in words. An ordinary man believes, that himself, his family, his house, and cattle, exist; but, in order to produce this belief in his mind, is it necessary, that he compare those objects with the general idea of existence or non-existence, so as to discern their agreement with the one, or disagreement with the other? I cannot think it: at least, if he has ever made such a comparison, it must have been without his knowledge; for I am convinced, that, if we were to ask him the question, he would not understand us.

Secondly, I apprehend, that Mr. Hume has not enumerated all the relations which, when discovered, give rise to certainty. I am certain, that I am the same person to-day I was yesterday. Mr. Hume indeed will not allow that this is possible\*. I cannot help it; I am certain notwithstanding;

\* See Part 2. chap. 2. sect. 1. of this Essay.



and I flatter myself, there are not many persons in the world who would think this sentiment of mine a paradox. I say, then, I am certain, that I am the same person to-day I was yesterday. Now, the relation expressed in this proposition is not resemblance, nor proportion in quantity and number, nor degrees of any common quality, nor contrariety: it is a relation different from all these; it is identity or sameness.—That London is contiguous to the Thames, is a proposition which many of the most sensible people in Europe hold to be certainly true; and yet the relation expressed in it, is none of those four which our author supposes to be the sole proprietors of certainty. For it is not in respect of resemblance, of proportion in quantity or number, of contrariety, or of degrees in any common quality, that London and the Thames are here compared, but purely in respect of place or situation.

Again, that the foregoing maxim is neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain, our author attempts to prove from this consideration, that we cannot demonstrate the impossibility of the contrary. Nay, the contrary, he says, is not inconceivable: “for we can conceive an object non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without joining it to the idea of a cause, which is an idea altogether distinct and different.” But this I presume, is not a fair state of the case. Can we conceive a thing beginning to exist, and yet bring ourselves to think that a cause is not necessary to the production of such a thing? If we cannot, (I am sure I cannot), then is the contrary of this maxim, when fairly stated, found to be truly and properly inconceivable.

But whether the contrary of this maxim be inconceivable or not, the maxim itself may be intuitively certain. Of intuitive, as well as of demon-

strable truths, there are different kinds. It is a character of some, that their contraries are inconceivable: such are the axioms of geometry. But of many other intuitive truths, the contraries are conceivable. "I do feel a hard body;"—"I do not feel a hard body;" these propositions are equally conceivable: the first is true, for I have a pen between my fingers; but I cannot prove its truth by argument; therefore its truth is perceived intuitively.

Thus far we have argued for the sake of argument, and opposed metaphysic to metaphysic\*, in order to prove, that our author's reasoning on the present subject is not conclusive. It is now time to enter into the merits of the cause, and consider the matter philosophically, that is, according to fact and experience. And in this way we bring it to a very short issue. The point in dispute is, Whether this maxim, "Whatever begins to exist, proceeds from some cause," be intuitively certain? That the mind naturally and necessarily assents to it without any doubt, and considers its contrary as impossible, I have already shewn; the maxim, therefore, is certainly true. That it cannot, by any argument, or medium of proof, be rendered more evident than it is when first apprehended by the mind, is also certain; for it is of itself as evident as any proposition that can be urged in proof it. If, therefore, this maxim be true, (as every rational being feels, and acknowledges), it is a principle of common sense: we believe it, not because we can give a reason, but because, by the law of our nature, we must believe it.

Our opinion of the necessity of a cause to the production of every thing that has a beginning, is by Mr. Hume, supposed to arise from observation

\* See Part 3. chap. 2. of this Essay.



and experience. It is true, that in our experience we have never found any thing beginning to exist, and proceeding from no cause; but I imagine it will not appear, that our belief of this axiom hath experience for its foundation. For let it be remarked, that some children, at a time when their experience is very scanty, seem to be as sensible of the truth of this axiom, as many persons arrived at maturity. I do not mean, that they ever repeat it in the form of a proposition; or that, if they were to hear it repeated in that form, they would instantly declare their assent to it; for a proposition can never be rationally assented to, except by those who understand the words that compose it: but I mean, that these children have a natural propensity to inquire after the cause of any effect or event that engages their attention; which they would not do, if the view of an event or effect did not suggest to them, that a cause is necessary to its production. Their curiosity in asking the reasons and causes of every thing they see and hear, is often very remarkable, and rises even to impertinence; at least it is called so when one is not prepared to give them an answer. I have known a child to break open his drum, to see if he could discover the cause of its extraordinary sound; and that at the hazard of rendering the play-thing unserviceable, and of being punished for his indiscretion. If the ardor of this curiosity were always proportioned to the extent of a child's experience, or to the care his teachers have taken to make him attentive to the dependence of effects on causes, we might then ascribe it to the power of education, or to a habit contracted by experience. But every one who has had an opportunity of conversing with children, knows that this is not the case; and that their curiosity cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by supposing it instinctive,

and, like all other instincts, stronger in some minds, and weaker in others, independently on experience and education, and in consequence of the appointment of that Being who hath been pleased to make one man differ from another in his intellectual accomplishments, as well as in his features, complexion, and size. Nor let it be imagined, because some children are in this respect more curious than others, that therefore the belief of this maxim is instinctive in some minds only: the maxim may be equally believed by all, notwithstanding this diversity. For do we not find a similar diversity in the genius of different *men*? Some men have a philosophical turn of mind, and love to investigate causes, and to have a reason ready on every occasion; others are indifferent as to these matters, being ingrossed by studies of another kind. And yet I presume it will be found, that the truth of this maxim is felt by every man, though perhaps many men never thought of putting it in words in the form of a proposition.

We repeat, therefore, that this axiom is one of the principles of common sense, which every rational mind does and must acknowledge to be true; not because it can be proved, but because the law of nature determines us to believe it without proof, and to look upon its contrary as perfectly absurd, impossible, and inconceivable.

The axiom now before us is the foundation of the most important argument that ever employed human reason; I mean that which, from the works that are created, evinces the eternal power and godhead of the Creator. That argument, as far as it resolves itself into this axiom, is properly a demonstration, being a clear deduction from a self-evident principle; and therefore no man can pretend to understand it, without feeling it to be conclusive. So that what the psalmist says of the



atheist is literally true, *He is a fool*; as really irrational as if he refused to be convinced by a mathematical demonstration. Nay, he is more irrational; because there is no truth demonstrated in mathematics which so many powers of our nature conspire to ratify, and with which the minds of the whole rational creation are so deeply impressed. The contemplation of the Divine Nature is the most useful and the most ennobling exercise in which our faculties can be engaged, and recommends itself to every man of sound judgment and good taste, as the most durable and the most perfect enjoyment, that can possibly fall to the share of any created being. Sceptics may wrangle, and mockers may blaspheme; but the pious man knows by evidence too sublime for their comprehension, that his affections are not misplaced, and that his hopes shall not be disappointed; by evidence which, to every sound mind, is fully satisfactory; but which to the humble and tender-hearted, is altogether overwhelming, irresistible, and divine.

That many of the objects in nature have had a beginning, is obvious to our own senses and memory, or confirmed by unquestionable testimony: these, therefore, according to the axiom we are here considering, must be believed to have proceeded from a cause adequate at least to the effects produced. That the whole sensible universe hath to us the appearance of an effect, of something which once was not, and which exists not by any necessity of nature, but by the arbitrary appointment of some powerful and intelligent cause different from and independent on it;——that the universe, I say, has this appearance, cannot be denied: and that it is what it appears to be, an effect; that it had a beginning, and was not from eternity, is proved by every sort of evidence the subject will admit. And if so, we offer violence to our under-

standing, when we attempt to believe that the whole universe does not proceed from some cause ; and we argue unphilosophically and irrationally, when we endeavour to disprove this natural and universal suggestion of the human mind.

It is true, the universe is, as one may say, a work *sui generis*, altogether singular, and such as we cannot properly compare to other works: because, indeed, all works are comprehended in it. But that natural dictate of the mind by which we believe the universe to have proceeded from a cause, arises from our considering it as an effect; a circumstance in which it is perfectly similar to all works whatsoever. The singularity of the effect rather confirms (if that be possible) than weakens our belief of the necessity of a cause ; at least it makes us more attentive to the cause, and interests us more deeply in it. What is the universe, but a vast system of works or effects, some of them great, and others small ; some more and some less considerable ? If each of these works, the least as well as the greatest, require a cause for its production ; is it not in the highest degree absurd and unnatural to say, that the whole is not the effect of a cause ?—Each link of a great chain must be supported by something, but the whole chain may be supported by nothing:—Nothing less than an ounce can be a counterpoise to an ounce, nothing less than a pound to a pound ; but the wing of a gnat, or nothing at all, may be a sufficient counterpoise to ten hundred thousand pounds:—Are not these assertions too absurd to deserve an answer ?

The reader, if he has the misfortune to be acquainted with Mr. Hume's *Essay on a particular providence and a future state*, will see, that these remarks are intended as an answer to a very strange argument there advanced against the belief of a Deity. "The universe," we are



told, "is an object quite singular and unparalleled; no other object that has fallen under our observation bears any similarity to it: neither it nor its cause can be comprehended under any known species; and therefore concerning the cause of the universe we can form no rational conclusion at all."

—I appeal to any man of sound judgment, whether that suggestion of his understanding, which prompts him to infer a cause from an effect, has any dependence upon a prior operation of his mind, by which the effect in question is referred to its genus or species. When he pronounces concerning any object which he conceives to have had a beginning, that it must have proceeded from some cause, does this judgment necessarily imply any comparison of that object with others of a like kind? If the new object were in every respect unlike to other objects, would this have any influence on his judgment? Would he not acknowledge a cause to be as necessary for the production of the most uncommon, as of the most familiar object?—If therefore I believe, that I myself owe my existence to some cause, because there is something in my mind which necessarily determines me to this belief, I must also, for the very same reason, believe, that the whole universe (supposed to have had a beginning) proceeds from some cause. The evidence of both is the same. If I believe the first and not the second, I believe and disbelieve the same evidence at the same time; I believe that the very same suggestion of my understanding is both true and false.

Though I were to grant, that, when an object is reducible to no known genus, no rational inference can be made concerning its cause; yet it will not follow, that our inferences concerning the cause of the universe are irrational, supposing it reasonable to believe that the universe had a beginning. If

there be in the universe any thing which is reducible to no known genus, let it be mentioned: if there be any presumption for the existence of such a thing, let the foundation of that presumption be explained. And, if you please, I shall, for argument's sake, admit, that concerning the cause of that particular thing, no rational conclusion can be formed. But it has never been asserted, that the existence of such a thing is either real or probable. Mr. Hume only asserts, that the universe itself, not any particular thing in the universe, is reducible to no known genus. Well then, let me ask, what is the universe? A word? No; it is a vast collection of things.—Are all these things reducible to genera? Mr. Hume does not deny it.—Each of these things, then, if it had a beginning, must also have had a cause? It must.—What thing in the universe exists uncaused? Nothing.—Is this a rational conclusion? So it seems.—It seems, then, that though it be rational to assign a cause to every thing in the universe, yet to assign a cause to the universe is not rational! It is shameful thus to trifle with words.—In fact, this argument of Mr. Hume's, so highly admired by its Author, is no argument at all. It is founded on a distinction that is perfectly inconceivable. Twenty shillings laid on a table make a pound: though you take up these twenty shillings, yet have you not taken up the pound; you have only taken up twenty shillings. If the reader cannot enter into this distinction, he will never be able to conceive in what the force of Mr. Hume's argument consists.

If the universe had a beginning, it must have had a cause. This is a self evident axiom, or at least an undeniable consequence of one. We necessarily assent to it; such is the law of our nature. If we deny it, we cannot, without absurdity, believe any thing else whatsoever; because we at the



same time deny the authenticity of those instinctive suggestions which are the foundation of all truth. The Atheist will never be able to elude the force of this argument, till he can prove, that every thing in nature exists necessarily, independently, and from eternity.

If Mr. Hume's argument be found to turn to so little account, from the simple consideration of the universe, as existing, and as having had a beginning, it will appear (if possible) still more irrational, when we take a view of the universe, and its parts as of works curiously adapted to certain ends. Their existence displays the necessity of a powerful cause; their frame proves the cause to be intelligent, good and wise. The meanest of the works of nature (if any of Nature's works may be called mean),—the arrangement necessary for the production of the smallest plant, requires in the cause a degree of power, intelligence, and wisdom, which infinitely transcends the sublimest exertions of human ability. What then shall we say of the cause that produces an animal, a rational soul, a world, a system of worlds, an universe? Shall we say, that infinite power and wisdom are not necessary attributes of that universal cause, though they be necessary attributes of the cause that produces a plant? Shall we say, that the maker of a plant may be acknowledged to be powerful, intelligent, and wise; because there are many other things in nature that resemble a plant; but that we cannot rationally acknowledge the maker of the universe to be wise, powerful, or intelligent, because there is nothing which the universe resembles, or to which it may be compared? Can the man who argues in this manner have any meaning to his words?

For an answer to the other cavils thrown out by Mr. Hume, in this flimsy essay against the divine attributes, the reader is referred to the first part of Butler's Analogy of Natural and Revealed Reli-

gion. It needs not be matter of any surprise, that we name, on this occasion, a book which was published before Mr. Hume's essay was written.—With infidel writers it has long been the fashion, (less frequently indeed with this author than with many others), to deliver as their own, and as entirely new, objections against religion, which have been repeatedly and unanswerably confuted. This piece of craft gives no offence to their disciples; these gentlemen, if they read at all, generally choosing to confine their inquiries to one side of the controversy: to themselves it is a considerable saving in the articles of time and invention.

## SECT. VI.

### *Of Probable or Experimental Reasoning.*

IN all our reasonings from the cause to the effect, we proceed on a supposition, and a belief, that the course of nature will continue to be in time to come, what we experience it to be at present, and remember it to have been in time past. This presumption of continuance is the foundation of all our judgments concerning future events: and this, in many cases, determines our conviction as effectually as any proof or demonstration whatsoever: although the conviction arising from it be different in kind from what is produced by strict demonstration, as well as from those kinds of conviction that attend the evidence of sense, memory, and abstract intuition. The highest degree of conviction in reasoning from causes to effects, is called *moral certainty*; and the inferior degrees result from that species of evidence which is called *probability* or *verisimilitude*. That all men will die; that the sun will rise to-morrow, and the sea



ebb and flow; that sleep will continue to refresh, and food to nourish us; that the same articulate sounds which to-day communicate the ideas of virtue and vice, meat and drink, man and beast, will to-morrow communicate the same ideas to the same persons;—no man can doubt, without being accounted a fool. In these, and in all other instances where our experience of the past has been equally extensive and uniform, our judgment concerning the future amounts to moral certainty: we believe, with full assurance, or at least without doubt, that the same laws of nature which have hitherto operated, will continue to operate as long as we foresee no cause to interrupt or hinder their operation.

But no person who attends to his own mind will say, that, in these cases, our belief, or conviction, or assurance, is the effect of a proof, or of any thing like it. If reasoning be at all employed, it is only in order to give us a clear view of our past experience with regard to the point in question.

When this view is obtained, reasoning is no longer necessary; the mind, by its own innate force, and in consequence of an irresistible and instinctive impulse, infers the future from the past immediately, and without the intervention of any argument. The sea has ebbcd and flowed twice every day in time past; therefore, the sea will continue to ebb and flow twice every day in the time to come,—is by no means a logical deduction of a conclusion from premises\*.

When our experience of the past has not been uniform nor extensive, our opinion with regard to the future falls short of moral certainty; and amounts only to a greater or less degree or smaller proportion of favourable instances:—we say, such

\* This remark was first made by Mr. Hume. See it illustrated at great length in his *Essays*, part 2. sect. 4. See also Dr. Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles*, p. 13, 14. Ed. 2.

an event will probably happen, such another is wholly improbable. If a medicine has proved salutary in one instance, and failed in five, a physician would not choose to recommend it, except in a desperate case; and would then consider its success as a thing rather to be wished than expected. An equal number of favourable and unfavourable instances leave the mind in a state of suspense, without exciting the smallest degree of assurance on either side, except, perhaps, what may arise from our being more interested on the one side than on the other. A physician influenced by such evidence, would say, "My patient may recover, and he may die: I am sorry to say, that the former event is not one whit more probable than the latter." When the favourable instances exceed the unfavourable in number, we begin to think the future event in some degree probable; and more or less so, according to the surplus of favourable instances. A few favourable instances, without any mixture of unfavourable ones, render an event probable in a pretty high degree: but the favourable experience must be at once extensive and uniform, before it can produce moral certainty.

A man brought into being at maturity, and placed in a desert island, would abandon himself to despair, when he first saw the sun set, and the night come on; for he could have no expectation that ever the day would be renewed. But he is transported with joy, when he again beholds the glorious orb appearing in the east, and the heavens and the earth illuminated as before. He again views the declining sun with apprehension, yet not without hope; the second night is less dismal than the first, but is still very uncomfortable on account of the weakness of the probability produced by one favourable instance. As the instances grow more numerous, the probability becomes stronger and



stronger: yet it may be questioned, whether a man in these circumstances would ever arrive at so high a degree of moral certainty in this matter, as we experience; who know, not only that the sun has risen every day since we began to exist, but also that the same phenomenon has happened regularly for more than five thousand years, without failing in a single instance. The judgment of our great epic poet appears no where to more advantage than in his eighth book; where Adam relates to the angel what passed in his mind immediately after his awaking into life. The following passage is at once transcendently beautiful, and philosophically just:

“ While thus I call’d, and stray’d I knew not whither,  
 From where I first drew air, and first beheld  
 This happy light, when answer none return’d,  
 On a green shady bank, profuse of flowers,  
 Pensive I sat me down; there gentle sleep  
 First found me, and with soft oppression seiz’d  
 My droused sense; *untroubled, though I thought*  
*I then was passing to my former state*  
*Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve\*.”*

Paradise Lost, b. 8. l. 283.

Adam at this time had no experience of sleep, and therefore could not, with any probability, expect that he was to recover from it. Its approaches were attended with feelings similar to those he had experienced when awaking from non-existence, and would naturally suggest that idea to his mind; and as he had no reason to expect that his life was to continue, would intimate the probability that he was again upon the verge of an insensible state.

\* The beauty of these lines did not escape the elegant and judicious Addison; but that author does not assign the reason of his approbation. Spect. No. 345.

Now it is evident, from what has been already said, that the degree of probability must be intuitively perceived, or the degree of assurance spontaneously and instinctively excited in the mind, upon the bare consideration of the instances on either side; and that without any medium of argument to connect the future event with the past experience. Reasoning may be employed in bringing the instances into view; but when that is done, it is no longer necessary. And if you were to argue with a man, in order to convince him that a certain future event is not so improbable as he seems to think, you would only make him take notice of some favourable instance which he had overlooked, or endeavour to render him suspicious of the reality of some of the unfavourable instances; leaving it to himself to estimate the degree of probability. If he continue refractory, notwithstanding that his view of the subject is the same with yours, he can be reasoned with in no other way, than by your appealing to the common sense of mankind.

## SECT. VII.

### *Of Analogical Reasoning.*

REASONING from analogy, when traced up to its source, will be found in like manner to terminate in a certain instinctive propensity, implanted in us by our Maker, which leads us to expect, that similar causes in similar circumstances, do probably produce, or will probably produce similar effects. The probability which this kind of evidence is fitted to illustrate, does, like the former, admit of a vast variety of degrees, from absolute doubting up to moral certainty. When the



ancient philosopher who was shipwrecked in a strange country, discovered certain geometrical figures drawn upon the sand by the sea-shore, he was naturally led to believe, with a degree of assurance not inferior to moral certainty, that the country was inhabited by men, some of whom were men of study and science, like himself. Had these figures been less regular, and more like the appearance of chance-work, the presumption from analogy, of the country being inhabited, would have been weaker; and had they been of such a nature as left it altogether dubious, whether they were the work of accident or of design, the evidence would have been too ambiguous to serve as a foundation for any opinion.

In reasoning from analogy, we argue *from* a fact or thing experienced *to* something similar not experienced; and from our view of the former arises an opinion with regard to the latter; which opinion will be found to imply a greater or less degree of assurance, according as the instance *from* which we argue is more or less similar to the instance *to* which we argue. Why the degree of our assurance is determined by the degree of likeness, we cannot tell; but we know by experience, that this is the case: and by experience also we know, that our assurance, such as it is, arises immediately in the mind, whenever we fix our attention on the circumstances in which the probable event is expected, so as to trace their resemblance to those circumstances in which we have known a similar event to take place. A child who has been burnt with a red-hot coal, is careful to avoid touching the flame of a candle; for as the visible qualities of the latter are like to those of the former, he expects, with a very high degree of assurance, that the effects produced by the candle operating on his fingers, will be similar to those

produced by the burning coal. And it deserves to be remarked, that the judgment a child forms on these occasions may arise, and often doth arise, previous to education and reasoning, and while experience is very limited. Knowing that a lighted candle is a dangerous object, he will be shy of touching a glow-worm, or a piece of wet fish shining in the dark, because of their resemblance to the flame of a candle: but as this resemblance is but imperfect, his judgment, with regard to the consequences of touching these objects, will probably be more inclined to doubt, than in the former case, where the instances were more similar.

Those who are acquainted with astronomy, think it extremely probable, that the planets are inhabited by living creatures, on account of their being in all other respects so like to our earth. A man who thinks them not much bigger than they appear to the eye, never dreams of such a notion; for to him they seem in every respect unlike to our earth: and there is no other way of bringing him over to the astronomer's opinion, than by explaining to him those particulars in which the planets and our earth resemble one another. As soon as he comprehends these particulars, and this resemblance, his mind of its own accord admits the probability of the new opinion, without being led to it by any medium of proof, connecting the facts he hath experienced with other similar and probable facts lying beyond the reach of his experience. Such a proof indeed could not be given. If he were not convinced of the probability by the bare view of the facts, you would impute his perseverance in his old opinion, either to obstinacy, or to want of common sense; two mental disorders for which logic provides no remedy.



## SECT. VIII.

*Of Faith in Testimony.*

THERE are in the world many men, whose declaration concerning any fact which they have seen, and of which they are competent judges, would engage my belief as effectually as the evidence of my own senses. A metaphysician may tell me, that this implicit confidence in testimony is unworthy of a philosopher and a logician, and that my faith ought to be more rational. It may be so; but I believe as before notwithstanding. And I find that all men have the same confidence in the testimony of certain persons; and that if a man should refuse to think as other men do in this matter, he would be called obstinate, whimsical, narrow-minded, and a fool. If, after the experience of so many ages, men are still disposed to believe the word of an honest man, and find no inconvenience in doing so, I must conclude, that it is not only natural, but rational, expedient, and manly, to credit such testimony: and though I were to peruse volumes of metaphysic written in proof of the fallibility of testimony, I should still, like the rest of the world, believe credible testimony without fear of inconvenience. I know very well, that testimony is not admitted in proof of any doctrine in mathematics, because the evidence of that science is quite of a different kind. But is truth to be found in mathematics only? is the geometrician the only person who exerts a rational belief? do we never find conviction arise in our minds, except when we contemplate an intuitive axiom, or run over a mathematical demonstration? In natural philosophy, a science not inferior to pure mathematics in the certainty of its conclusions, testimony is admitted as a sufficient

proof of many facts. To believe testimony, therefore, is agreeable to nature, to reason, and to sound philosophy.

When we believe the declaration of an honest man, in regard to facts of which he has had experience, we suppose, that by the view or perception of those facts, his senses have been affected in the same manner as ours would have been if we had been in his place. So that faith in testimony is in part resolvable into that conviction which is produced by the evidence of sense: at least, if we did not believe our senses, we could not, without absurdity, believe testimony; if we have any tendency to doubt the evidence of sense, we must, in regard to testimony, be equally sceptical. Those philosophers, therefore, who would persuade us to reject the evidence of sense, among whom are to be reckoned all who deny the existence of matter, are not to be considered as mere theorists, whose speculations are of too abstract a nature to do any harm, but as men of the most dangerous principles. Not to mention the bad effects of such doctrine upon science in general\*, I would only at present call upon the reader to attend to its influence upon our religious opinions and historical knowledge. Testimony is the grand external evidence of christianity. All the miracles wrought by our Saviour, and particularly that great decisive miracle, his resurrection from the dead, were so many appeals to the senses of men in proof of his divine mission: and whatever some unthinking cavillers may object, this we affirm to be not only the most proper, but the only proper kind of external evidence, that can be employed, consistently with man's free agency and moral probation, for establishing a popular and universal religion among mankind. Now, if matter has no

\* See below, part 2. chap. 2, sect. 2.



existence but in our mind, our senses are deceitful : and if so, St. Thomas must have been deceived when he felt, and the rest of the apostles when they saw the body of their Lord after his resurrection ; and all the facts recorded in history, both sacred and civil, were no better than dreams or delusions, with which perhaps St. Matthew, St. John, and St. Luke, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Cesar were affected, but which they had no more ground of believing to be real, than I have of believing, in consequence of my having dreamed it, that I was last night in Constantinople. Nay, if I admit Berkeley's and Hume's theory, of the non-existence of matter, I must believe, that what my senses declare to be true, is not only not truth, but directly contrary to it. For does not this philosophy teach, that what seems to human sense to exist, does not exist ; and that what seems corporeal is incorporeal ? and are not existence and non-existence, materiality and immateriality, contraries ? Now, if men ought to believe the contrary of what their senses declare to be true, the evidence of all history, of all testimony, and indeed of all external perception, is no longer any evidence of the reality of the facts warranted by it ; but becomes, on the contrary, a proof that those facts did never happen. If it be urged, as an objection to this reasoning, that Berkeley was a Christian, notwithstanding his scepticism (or paradoxical belief) in other matters ; I answer, that though he maintained the doctrine of the non-existence of body, there is no evidence that he either believed or understood it : nay, there is positive evidence that he did neither ; as I shall have occasion to show afterwards\*.

Again, when we believe a man's word, because we know him to be honest, or, in other words, have

\* See part 2. chap. 2. sect. 2. of this Essay.

had experience of his veracity, all reasoning on such testimony is supported by the evidence of experience, and by our presumption of the continuance of the laws of nature :—the first evidence resolves itself into instinctive conviction, and the second is itself an instinctive presumption. The principles of common sense, therefore, are the foundation of all true reasoning concerning testimony of this kind.

It is said by Mr. Hume, in his *Essay on Miracles*, that our belief of any fact from the report of eye-witnesses is derived from no other principle than experience ; that is, from our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the report of witnesses. This doctrine is confuted with great elegance and precision, and with invincible force of argument, in Dr. Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles*. It is, indeed, like most of Mr. Hume's capital doctrines, directly repugnant to matter of fact : for our credulity is greatest when our experience is least : that is, when we are children ; and generally grows less and less, in proportion as our experience becomes more and more extensive : the very contrary of which must happen, if Mr. Hume's doctrine were true.

There is then in a man a propensity to believe testimony antecedent to that experience, which Mr. Hume supposes, of the conformity of facts to the report of witnesses. But there is another sort of experience, which may perhaps have some influence in determining children to believe in testimony. Man is naturally disposed to speak as he thinks ; and most men do so : for the most egregious liars speak truth a hundred times\* for once that they utter falsehood. It is unnatural for human creatures to falsify ; and they never think of departing from the truth, except

\* See Dr. Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, p. 474.



they have some end to answer by it. Accordingly children, while their native simplicity remains uncorrupted, while they have no vice to disguise, no punishment to fear, and no artificial scheme to promote, do for the most part, if not always, speak as they think: and so generally is their veracity acknowledged, that it has passed into a proverb, That children and fools tell truth. Now I am not certain, but this their innate propensity to speak truth, may in part account for their readiness to believe what others speak. They do not suspect the veracity of others, because they are conscious and confident of their own. However, there is nothing absurd or unphilosophical in supposing, that they believe testimony by one law of their nature, and speak truth by another. I seek not therefore to resolve the former principle into the latter; I mention them for the sake only of observing, that whether they be allowed to be different principles, or different effects of the same principle, our general doctrine remains equally clear, namely, That all reasoning concerning the evidence of testimony, does finally terminate in the principles of common sense. This is true, as far as our faith in testimony is resolvable into experimental conviction; because we have already shown, that all reasoning from experience is resolvable into intuitive principles, either of certain or of probable evidence: and surely it is no less true, as far as our faith in testimony is itself instinctive, and such as cannot be resolved into any higher principle.

Our faith in testimony does often, but not always, amount to absolute certainty. That there is such a city as Constantinople, such a country as Lapland, and such a mountain as the peak of Teneriffe; that there were such men as Hannibal and Julius Cesar; that England was conquered by William the Norman; that Charles I. was beheaded;—of these, and

such like truths, every person acquainted with history and geography accounts himself absolutely certain. When a number of persons, not acting in concert, having no interest to disguise the truth, and sufficient judges of that to which they bear testimony, concur in making the same report, it would be accounted madness not to believe them. Nay, when a number of witnesses, separately examined, and having had no opportunity to concert a plan beforehand, do all agree in their declarations, we make no scruple of yielding full faith to their testimony, even though we have no evidence of their honesty or skill; nay, though they be notorious both for knavery and folly: because the fictions of the human mind being infinite, it is impossible that each of these witnesses should, by mere accident, devise the very same circumstances; if therefore their declarations concur, this is a certain proof, that there is no fiction in the case, and that they all speak from real experience and knowledge. The inference we form on these occasions, is supported by arguments drawn from our experience; and all arguments of this sort are resolvable into the principles of common sense. In general, it will be found true of all our reasonings concerning testimony, that they are founded, either mediately or immediately upon instinctive conviction or instinctive assent; so that he who has resolved to believe nothing but what he can give a reason for, can never, consistently with this resolution, believe any thing, either as certain or as probable, upon the testimony of other men.



## SECT. IX.

*Conclusion of this Chapter.*

THE conclusion to which we are led by the above induction, would perhaps be admitted by some to be self-evident, or at least to stand in no great need of illustration ; to others it might have been proved *a priori* in very few words ; but to the greater part of readers, a detail of particulars may be necessary, in order to produce that *steady and well-grounded conviction* which it is our ambition to establish.

The argument *a priori* might be comprehended in the following words. If there be any creatures in human shape, who deny the distinction between truth and falsehood, or who are unconscious of that distinction, they are far beyond the reach, and below the notice of philosophy, and therefore have no concern in this inquiry. Whoever is sensible of that distinction, and is willing to acknowledge it, must confess that truth is something fixed and determinate, depending not upon man, but upon the Author of nature. The fundamental principles of truth, must therefore rest upon their own evidence, perceived intuitively by the understanding. If they did not, if reasoning were necessary to enforce them, they must be exposed to perpetual vicissitude, and appear under a different form in every individual, according to the peculiar turn and character of his reasoning powers. Were this the case, no man could know, of any proposition, whether it were true or false, till after he had heard all the arguments that had been urged for and against it ; and, even then, he could not know with certainty, whether he had heard all that could be urged : future disputants might overturn the former arguments,

and produce new ones, to continue unanswered for awhile, and then submit, in their turn, to their successors. Were this the case, there could be no such thing as an appeal to the common sense of mankind, even as in a state of nature there can be no appeal to the law ; every man would be “a law unto himself,” not in morals only, but in science of every kind.

We sometimes repine at the narrow limits prescribed to human capacity. *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further*, seems a hard prohibition, when applied to the operations of mind. But as, in the material world, it is to this prohibition man owes his security and existence ; so, in the immaterial system, it is to this we owe our dignity, our virtue, and our happiness. A beacon blazing from a well-known promontory, is a welcome object to the bewildered mariner ; who is so far from repining that he has not the beneficial light in his own keeping, that he is sensible its utility depends on its being placed on the firm land, and committed to the care of others.

We have now proved, that “except we believe many things without proof, we never can believe any thing at all ; for that all sound reasoning must ultimately rest on the principles of common sense, that is, on principles intuitively certain, or intuitively probable ; and consequently, that common sense is the ultimate judge of truth, to which reason must continually act in subordination\*.” To common sense, therefore, all truth must be conformable ; this is its fixed and invariable standard. And whatever contradicts common sense, or is inconsistent with that standard, though supported by arguments that are deemed unanswerable, and by

\* See part 1. chap. 1. sub. fin.



names that are celebrated by all the critics, academies, and potentates on earth, is not truth, but falsehood. In a word, the dictates of common sense are, in respect to human knowledge in general, what the axioms of geometry are in respect to mathematics: on the supposition that those axioms are false or dubious, all mathematical reasoning falls to the ground; and on the supposition that the dictates of common sense are erroneous or deceitful, all science, truth, and virtue are vain.

I know not but it may be urged as an objection to this doctrine, that, if we grant common sense to be the ultimate judge in all disputes, a great part of ancient and modern philosophy becomes useless. I admit the objection with all my heart, in its full force, and with all its consequences; and yet I must repeat, that if common sense be supposed fallacious, all knowledge is at an end: and that even a demonstration of the fallacy would itself be fallacious and frivolous. For if the dictates of my nature deceive me in one case, how shall I know that they do not deceive me in another? When a philosopher demonstrates to me, that matter exists not but in my mind, and independent on me and my faculties, has no existence at all; before I admit his demonstration, I must disbelieve all my senses, and distrust every principle of belief within me: before I admit his demonstration, I must be convinced, that I and all mankind are fools: that our Maker made us such, and from the beginning intended to impose on us; and that it was not till about the six-thousandth year of the world when this imposture was discovered; and then discovered, not by a divine revelation, not by any rational investigation of the laws of nature, not by any inference from previous truths of acknowledged authority, but by a pretty play of English and French words, to which the learned have given the

name of metaphysical reasoning. Before I admit this pretended demonstration, I must bring myself to believe what I find to be incredible; which seems to me not a whit less difficult than to perform what is impossible. And when all this is done, if it were possible that all this could be done, pray what is science, or truth, or falsehood? Shall I believe nothing? or shall I believe every thing? Or am I capable either of belief, or of disbelief? or do I exist? or is there such a thing as existence?

The end of all science, and indeed of every useful pursuit, is to make men happier, by improving them in wisdom and virtue. I beg leave to ask, whether the present race of men owe any part of their virtue, wisdom, or happiness, to what metaphysicians have written in proof of the non-existence of matter, and the necessity of human actions? If it be answered, That our happiness, wisdom, and virtue, are not at all affected by such controversies, then I must affirm, that all such controversies are useless. And if it be true, that they have a tendency to promote wrangling, which of all kinds of conversation is the most unpleasant, and the most unprofitable; or vain polemical disquisition, which cannot be carried on without waste of time, and prostitution of talents; or scepticism, which tends to make a man uncomfortable in himself, and unserviceable to others:—then I must affirm, that all such controversies are both useless and mischievous; and that the world would be more wise, more virtuous, and more happy, without them.—But it is said, that they improve the understanding, and render it more capable of discovering truth, and detecting error. Be it so:—but though bars and locks render our houses secure; and though acuteness of hearing and feeling be a valuable endowment; it will not follow, that thieves are a public



blessing; or that the man is entitled to my gratitude, who quickens my touch and hearing, by putting out my eyes.

It is further said, that such controversies make us sensible of the weakness of human reason, and the imperfection of human knowledge; and for the sanguinary principles of bigotry and enthusiasm, substitute the milky ones of scepticism and moderation. And this is conceived to be of prodigious emolument to mankind; because a firm attachment to religion, which a man may call bigotry if he pleases, doth often give rise to a persecuting spirit; whereas, a perfect indifference about it, which some men are good-natured enough to call moderation, is a principle of great good-breeding, and gives no sort of disturbance, either in private or public life. This is a plea on which our modern sceptics plume themselves not a little. And who will venture to arraign the virtue or the sagacity of these projectors? To accomplish so great effects by means so simple; to prevent such dreadful calamities by so innocent an artifice,—does it not display the perfection of benevolence and wisdom? Truly I can hardly imagine such another scheme, except perhaps the following. Suppose a physician of the Sangrado school, out of zeal for the interest of the faculty, and the public good, to prepare a bill to be laid before the parliament, in these words: “That whereas good health, especially when of long standing, has a tendency to prepare the human frame for acute and inflammatory distempers, which have been known to give extreme pain to the unhappy patient, and sometimes even bring him to the grave; and whereas the said health, by making us brisk, and hearty, and happy, is apt also, on some occasions, to make us disorderly and licentious, to the great detriment of glass windows, lanthorns, and watchmen: be it therefore enacted, that all the inhabitants of these realms, for the peace of govern-

ment, and the repose of the subject, be compelled, on pain of death, to bring their bodies down to a consumptive habit; and that henceforth no person presume to walk abroad with a cane, on pain of having his head broke with it, and being set in the stocks for six months; nor to walk at all, except with crutches, to be delivered at the public charge to each person who makes affidavit, that he is no longer able to walk without them." &c.—He who can eradicate conviction from the human heart, may doubtless prevent all the fatal effects of enthusiasm and bigotry; and if all human bodies were thrown into a consumption, I believe there would be an end of riot, as well as of inflammatory diseases. Whether the inconveniences, or the remedies be the greater grievance, might perhaps bear a question. Bigotry, enthusiasm, and a persecuting spirit, are very dangerous and destructive; universal scepticism, would, I am sure, be equally so, if it were to infect the generality of mankind. But what has religion and rational conviction to do with either? Nothing more than good health has to do with acute distempers, and rebellious insurrections; or than the peace of government, and tranquillity of the subject, have to do with a gradual decay of our muscular flesh. True religion tends to make men great, and good, and happy; and if so, its doctrines can never be too firmly believed, nor held in too high veneration. And if truth be at all attainable in philosophy, I cannot see why we should scruple to receive it as such, when we have attained it; nor how it can promote candour, good-breeding, and humanity, to pretend to doubt what we do and must believe, to profess to maintain doctrines of which we are conscious that they shock our understanding, to differ in judgment from all the world except a few metaphysical pedants, and to question the evidence of those



principles which all other men think the most unquestionable, and most sacred. Conviction and steadiness of principle, is that which gives dignity, uniformity, and spirit, to human conduct, and without which our happiness can neither be lasting nor sincere. It constitutes, as it were, the vital stamina of a great and manly character; whereas, scepticism betrays a weak and sickly understanding, and a levity of mind, from which nothing can be expected but inconsistency and folly. In conjunction with ill-nature, bad taste, and a hard heart, steadiness and strong conviction will doubtless make a bad man, and scepticism will make a worse: but good-nature, elegant taste, and sensibility of heart, when united with firmness of mind, become doubly respectable and lovely: whereas no man can act on the principles of scepticism, without incurring universal contempt.—But to return:

Mathematicians, and natural philosophers, do in effect admit the distinction between common sense and reason, as illustrated above; for they are content to rest their sciences either on self-evident axioms, or on experiments warranted by the evidence of external sense. The philosophers who treat of the mind, do also sometimes profess to found their doctrines on the evidence of sense: but this profession is merely verbal; for whenever experience contradicts the system, they question the authenticity of that experience, and show you, by a most elaborate investigation, that it is all a cheat. For it is easy to write plausibly on any subject, and in vindication of any doctrine, when either the indolence of the reader, or the nature of the composition, gives the writer an opportunity to avail himself of the ambiguity of language. It is not often that men attend to the operations of the mind; and when they do, it is perhaps with



some metaphysical book in their hands, which they read with a resolution to admire or despise, according as the fashion or their humour directs them. In this situation, or even when they are disposed to judge impartially of the writer, their attention to what passes in their own minds is but superficial, and is very apt to be swayed by a secret bias in favour of some theory. And then, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a natural feeling and a prejudice of education; and our deference to the opinion of a favourite author makes us think it more difficult than it really is, and very often leads us to mistake the one for the other. Nay, the very act of studying discomposes our minds a little, and prevents that free play of the faculties from which alone we can judge with accuracy of their real nature.—Besides, language, being originally intended to answer the obvious exigences of life, and express the qualities of matter, becomes metaphorical when applied to the operations of mind. Thus we talk metaphorically, when we speak of a warm imagination, a sound judgment, a tenacious memory, an enlarged understanding; these epithets being originally and properly expressive of material qualities. This circumstance, however obvious, is not always attended to; and hence we are apt to mistake verbal analogies for real ones, and apply the laws of matter to the operations of mind; and thus, by the mere delusion of words, are led into error before we are aware, and while our premises seem to be altogether unexceptionable. It is a favourite maxim with Locke, as it was with some ancient philosophers, that the human soul, previous to education, is like a piece of white paper, or *tabula rasa*; and this simile, harmless as it may appear, betrays our great modern into several important mistakes. It is indeed one of the most unlucky allusions that



could have been chosen. The human soul, when it begins to think, is not extended, nor inert, nor of a white colour, nor incapable of energy, nor wholly unfurnished with ideas, (for, if it think at all, it must have some ideas, according to Locke's definition of the word\*), nor as susceptible of any one impression or character as of any other. In what respect then does the human soul resemble a piece of white paper? To this philosophical conundrum I confess I can give no serious answer.—Even when the terms we use are not metaphorical, the natural abstruseness of the subject makes them appear somewhat mysterious; and we are apt to consider them as of more significance than they really are. Had Mr. Hume told the world in plain terms, that virtue is a species of vice, darkness a sort of light, and existence a kind of non-existence, I know not what metaphysicians might have thought of the discovery; but sure I am, no reader of tolerable understanding would have paid him any compliments upon it†. But

\* The word *idea* serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks.—I have used it to express whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking.

*Introduction to Essay on Human Understanding, sect. 8.*

† Mr. Hume had said, that the only principles of connexion among ideas are three, to wit, resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and cause or effect: *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding, sect. 3.* It afterwards occurred to him, that contrary ideas have a tendency to introduce one another into the mind. But instead of adding contrariety to the list of connecting principles, which he ought to have done, and which would have been philosophical, he assumes the metaphysician, and endeavours to prove his enumeration right, by resolving contrariety, as a species, into resemblance and causation, as genera; “contrariety,” says he, “is a connexion among ideas, which may perhaps be considered as a mixture of causation and resemblance. Where two objects are contrary, the one destroys the other, *i. e.* is the cause of its annihilation; and



when he says, that contrariety is a mixture of causation and resemblance; and, still more, when he brings a formal proof of this most sage remark, he imposes on us by the solemnity of the expression; we conclude, that "more is meant than meets the ear;" and begin to fancy, not that the author is absurd or unintelligible, but that we have not sagacity enough to discover his meaning. It were tedious to reckon up one half of the improprieties and errors which have been introduced into the philosophy of human nature, by the indefinite application of the words, *idea*, *impression*, *perception*, *sensation*, &c. Nay, it is well known, that Berkeley's pretended proof of the non-existence of matter, at which common sense stood aghast for many years, has no better foundation, than the ambiguous use of a word. He who considers these things, will not be much disposed to overvalue metaphysical truth, (as it is called) when it happens to contradict any of the natural sentiments of mankind.

In the laws of nature, when thoroughly understood, there appear no contradictions: It is only in the systems of philosophers that reason and common sense are at variance. No man of common sense ever did or could believe, that the horse he saw coming towards him at full gallop, was an idea in his mind, and nothing else; no thief was ever such a fool as to plead in his own defence, that his crime was necessary and unavoidable, for that man is born to pick pockets as the sparks fly upward.

the idea of the annihilation of an object, implies the idea of its former existence." Is it possible to make any sense of this? Darkness and light are contrary; the one destroys the other, or is the cause of its annihilation; and the idea of the annihilation of darkness implies the idea of its former existence. This is given as a proof, that darkness partly resembles light, and partly is the cause of light. Indeed! But, *O si sic omnia dixisset!* This is a harmless absurdity.



When Reason invades the Rights of Common Sense, and presumes to arraign that authority by which she herself acts, nonsense and confusion must of necessity ensue; science will soon come to have neither head nor tail, beginning nor end; philosophy will grow contemptible; and its adherents, far from being treated, as in former times, upon the footing of conjurors, will be thought by the vulgar, and by every man of sense, to be little better than downright fools.

## PART II.

### ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PRECEDING DOCTRINE, WITH INFERENCES.

BUT now a difficulty occurs, which it is not perhaps easy to solve. Granting what is said above to be true; that all legitimate reasoning, whether of certain or of probable evidence, does finally resolve itself into principles of common sense, which we must admit as certain, or as probable, upon their own authority; that therefore common sense is the foundation and the standard of all just reasoning; and that the genuine sentiments of nature are never erroneous:—yet, by what criterion shall we know a sentiment of nature from a prejudice of education, a dictate of common sense from the fallacy of an inveterate opinion? Must every principle be admitted as true, which we believe without being able to assign a reason? then where is our security against prejudice and implicit faith! Or must every principle that seems intuitively certain, or intuitively probable, be reasoned upon, that we may know whether it be really what it seems? then where were our security against the abuse so much insisted on, of subject-

ing common sense to the test of reasoning!—At what point must reason stop in its investigations, and the dictates of common sense be admitted as decisive and final?

It is much to be regretted, that this matter has been so little attended to : for a full and satisfactory discussion of it would do more real service to the philosophy of human nature, than all the systems of logic in the world ; would at once exalt pneumatology to the dignity of science, by settling it on a firm and unchangeable foundation ; and would go a great way to banish sophistry from science, and rid the world of scepticism. This is indeed the grand desideratum in logic ; of no less importance to the moral sciences, than the discovery of the longitude to navigation. That I shall fully solve this difficulty, I am not so vain, nor so ignorant as to imagine. But I humbly hope I shall be able to throw some light on the subject, and contribute a little to facilitate the progress of those who may hereafter engage in the same pursuit. If I can accomplish even this, I shall do a service to truth, philosophy, and mankind : if I should be thought to fail, there is yet something meritorious in the attempt. To have set the example, may be of consequence.

I shall endeavour to conduct the reader to the conclusion I have come to on this subject, by the same steps that led me thither ; a method which I presume will be more perspicuous, and more satisfying, than if I were first to lay down a theory, and then assign the reasons. By the way, I cannot help expressing a wish, that this method of investigation were less uncommon, and that philosophers would sometimes explain to us, not only their discoveries, but also the process of thought and experiment, whether accidental or intentional, by which they were led to them.



If the boundary of Reason and Common Sense had never been settled in any science, I would abandon my present scheme as altogether desperate. But when I reflect, that in some of the sciences it has been long settled, with the utmost accuracy, and to universal satisfaction, I conceive better hopes; and flatter myself, that it may perhaps be possible to fix it even in the philosophy of the mind. The sciences in which this boundary has been long settled and acknowledged, are, mathematics, and natural philosophy; and it is remarkable, that more truth has been discovered in those sciences than in any other. Now, there is not a more effectual way of learning the rules of any art, than by attending to the practice of those who have performed in it most successfully: a maxim which, I suppose, is no less applicable to the art of investigating truth, than to the mechanical and the fine arts. Let us see, then, whether, by attending to the practice of mathematicians and natural philosophers, as contrasted with the practice of those who have treated of the human mind, we can make any discoveries preparatory to the solution of this difficulty.

## CHAP. I.

*Confirmation of this Theory from the Practice of Mathematicians and Natural Philosophers.*

### SECT. 1.

THAT the distinction between Reason and Common Sense, as here explained, is acknowledged by mathematicians, we have already shown\*. They have been wise enough to trust to

\* See part 1. chap 2. sect. 1.

the dictates of common sense, and to take that for truth which they were under a necessity of believing, even though it was not in their power to prove it by argument. When a mathematician arrives, in the course of his reasoning, at a principle which he must believe, and which is of itself so evident, that no arguments could either illustrate or enforce it, he then knows, that his reason can carry him no further, and he sits down contented: and if he can satisfy himself, that the whole investigation is fairly conducted, and does indeed terminate in this self-evident principle, he is persuaded, that his conclusion is true, and cannot possibly be false. Whereas the modern sceptics, from a strange conceit, that the dictates of their understanding are fallacious, and that nature has her roguish emissaries in every corner, commissioned and sworn to play tricks with poor mortals, cannot find in their heart to admit any thing as truth, upon the bare authority of their common sense. It is doubtless a great advantage to geometry, that its first principles are so few, its ideas so distinct, and its language so definite. Yet a captious and paradoxical wrangler might, by dint of sophistry, involve the principles even of this science in confusion, provided he thought it worth his while†. But geometrical paradoxes would not rouse the attention of the public; whereas moral paradoxes, when men begin to look about for arguments in vindication of impiety, debauchery, and injustice, become wonderfully interesting, and can hardly fail of a powerful and numerous patronage. The corrupt judge; the prostituted courtier; the statesman who enrich-

† The author of the *Treatise of Human Nature* has actually attempted this in his first volume; but finding, no doubt, that the public would not take any concern in that part of his system, he has not republished it in his *Essays*.



es himself by the plunder and blood of his country; the pettifogger, who fattens on the spoils of the fatherless and widow; the oppressor, who, to pamper his own beastly appetite, abandons the deserving peasant to beggary and despair; the hypocrite, the debauchee, the gamester, the blasphemer,—prick up their ears when they are told, that a celebrated author has written a book full of such comfortable doctrines as the following:—That justice is not a natural, but an artificial virtue, depending wholly on the arbitrary institutions of men\*, and, previous to the establishment of civil society, not at all incumbent:—That moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues, are all of the same kind†; in other words, That to want honesty, to want understanding, and to want a leg, are equally the objects of moral disapprobation; and therefore that it is no more a man's duty to be grateful or pious, than to have the genius of Homer, or the strength and beauty of Achilles:—That every human action is necessary, and could not have been different from what it is‡:—That when we speak of power as an attribute of any being, God himself not excepted, we use words without meaning:—That we can form no idea of power, nor of any being endued with any power, *much less* of one endued with infinite power; and that we can never have reason to believe, that any object, or quality of an object, exists, of which we cannot form an idea\*:—That it is unreasonable to believe God to be infinitely wise and good, while there is any evil or disorder in the universe; and that we have no

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 37.

† Ibid. vol. 3. part 3. sect. 4.

‡ Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 91. edit. 1767.

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 284. 302. 432. &c.

good reason to think, that the universe proceeds from a cause†:—That the external material world does not exist‡; and that if the external world be once called in doubt as to its existence, we shall be at a loss to find arguments by which we may prove the Being of God, or any of his attributes§:—That those who believe any thing certainly are fools\*\*:—That adultery must be practised, if men would obtain all the advantages of life; that, if generally practised, it would soon cease to be scandalous; and that, if practised secretly and frequently, it would by degrees come to be thought no crime at all\*:—That the question concerning the substance of the soul is unintelligible†:—That matter and motion may often be regarded as the cause of thought‡:—That the soul of man becomes every different moment a different being||: so that the actions I performed last year, or yesterday, or this morning, whether virtuous or vicious, are no more imputable to me, than the virtues of Aristides are imputable to Nero, or the crimes of Nero to the MAN of Ross.

I know no geometrical axiom, more perspicuous, more evident, more generally acknowledged, than this proposition, (which every man believes of himself,) "My body exists;" yet this has been denied,

† Hume's Essay on a Particular Providence and Future State.

‡ Berkeley's and Hume's Works *passim*.

§ Hume's Essay on the Academical or Sceptical philosophy, part 1.

\*\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 468.

\* Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 409. edit. 1767.

† Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 434.

‡ Id. *ibid*.

|| Id. vol. 1. p. 43.



and volumes written to prove it false. Who will pretend to set bounds to this spirit of scepticism and sophistry? Where are the principles that can stop its progress, when it has already attacked the existence both of the human body, and of the human soul? When it denies, and attempts to disprove this, I cannot see why it may not as well deny a whole to be greater than a part, the radii of the same circle to be equal to one another; and affirm, that two right lines do contain a space, and that it is possible for the same thing to be and not to be.

Had our sceptics been consulted when the first geometrical institutions were compiled, they would have given a strange turn to the face of affairs. They would have demanded reasons for the belief of every axiom; and as none could have been given, would have suspected a fallacy; and probably (for the art of metaphysical book-making is not of difficult attainment) have made books to prove *a priori*, that an axiom, from its very nature cannot be true; or at least that we cannot with certainty pronounce whether it is so or not. "Take heed to yourselves, gentlemen; you are going to lay the foundations of a science; be careful to lay them as deep as possible. Let the love of doubt and disputation animate you to invincible perseverance. You must go deeper; truth (if there be any such thing) loves profundity and darkness. Hitherto I see you quite distinctly; and, let me tell you, that is a strong presumption against your method of operation. I would not give two-pence for that philosophy which is obvious and intelligible\*. Tear up that prejudice, that I may see what supports it. I see you cannot move it, and therefore am violently disposed to question its stability; you cannot pierce it, therefore who knows but it may

\* See Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 3. 4.

be made of unsound materials? There is no trusting to appearances. It is the glory of a philosopher to doubt; yea, he must doubt, both when he is doubtful, and when he is not doubtful\*. Sometimes, indeed, we philosophers are absolutely and necessarily determined to live, and talk, and act, like other people, and to believe the existence both of ourselves and of others: but to this absolute and necessary determination we ought not to submit, but in every incident of life still to preserve our scepticism. Yes, friend, I tell you, we ought still to do what is contrary to that to which we are absolutely and necessarily determined†. I see you preparing to speak, but I tell you once for all, that if you reason or believe any thing *certainly* you are a fool‡.—Good Sir, how

\* “A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction.”

*Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 474.*

† “I dine, I play a game at back-gammon, I converse and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, so strained, and so ridiculous that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further. Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determined to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life.” *Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 467.*

“In all incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay, if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles.”

*Id. p. 469.*

‡ “If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable.” *Id. p. 468.*

The inaccuracy of the expression makes it difficult to guess, whether Mr. Hume means, that all who believe any thing are *certainly* fools, or that all are fools who believe any thing *to be certain*.—But whether we suppose it to have the former meaning, or the latter, is a thing of small concern.



deep must we dig? Is not this a sure foundation?—I have no reason to think so, as I cannot see what is under it. Then we must dig downward *in infinitum*!—And why not? You think you are arrived at certainty. This very conceit of yours is a proof that you have not gone deep enough: for you must know, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life†. This to the illiterate vulgar may seem as great a contradiction or paradox, as if we were to talk of a man's jumping down his own throat: but we whose brains are heated with metaphysic, are not startled at paradoxes or contradictions, because we are ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or more likely than another‡. You are no true philosopher if you either begin or end your inquiries with the belief of any thing.—Well, Sir, you may doubt and dispute as long as you please; but I believe that I am come to a sure foundation: here therefore will I begin to build, for I am certain there can be no danger in trusting to the stability of that which is immoveable.—Certain! Poor credulous fool! Hark ye, sirrah! you may be what the vulgar call an honest man, and a good workman; but I am certain (I mean I am in doubt whether I may not be certain) that you are

† Verbatim from Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 464: 465.

‡ “The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason, has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another.”

*Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 466.*

no philosopher. Philosopher indeed! to take a thing of such consequence for granted, without proof, without examination! I hold you four to one, that I shall demonstrate *a priori*, that this same edifice of yours will be good for nothing. I am inclined to think, that we live in too early a period to discover ANY PRINCIPLES that will bear the examination of the latest posterity; the world, Sir, is not yet arrived at the years of discretion; it will be time enough, two or three thousand years hence, for men to begin to dogmatize, and affirm, that two and two are four, that a triangle is not a square, that the radii of the same circle are equal, that a whole is greater than one of its parts; that ingratitude and murder are crimes, that benevolence, justice, and fortitude, are virtues; that fire burns, that the sun shines, that human creatures exist, or that there is such a thing as existence. These are points which our posterity, if they be wise, will very probably reject\*. These

\* "Perhaps we are still in too early an age of the world. to discover *any principles* which will bear the examination of the latest posterity."

*Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 473.*

Some perhaps may blame me for laying any stress on detached sentences, and for understanding these strong expressions in a strict signification. But it is not my intention to take any unfair advantages. I should willingly impute these absurd sentences and expressions to the author's inadvertency: but then I must impute the whole system to the same cause; for they imply nothing that is not again and again inculcated, either directly or indirectly in Mr. Hume's writings. It is true some of them are self-contradictory, and all of them strongly display the futility of this pretended science. But who is to blame for this? They who allow themselves to contradict matter of fact, either in conversation or writing, will find it no easy matter to avoid contradicting themselves.—Again, if this science be so useless, and if its inutility be sometimes acknowledged even by Mr. Hume himself, why, it may be said, so much zeal in confuting it? For this plain reason, Because it is immoral and pernicious, as well as un-



are points, which if they do not reject, they will be arrant fools. This is my judgment, and I am certain it is right. I maintain, indeed, that mankind are certain of nothing : but I maintain, notwithstanding, that my own opinions are true. And if any body is ill-natured enough to call this a contradiction, I protest against his judgment, and once for all declare, that I mean not either to contradict myself, or to acknowledge myself guilty of self-contradiction."

I am well aware, that mathematical certainty is not to be expected in any science but mathematics. But I suppose that in every science, some kind of certainty is attainable, or something at least sufficient to command belief : and whether this rests on self-evident axioms, or on the evidence of sense, memory or testimony, it is still certain to me, if I feel that I must believe it. And in every science, as well as in geometry, I presume it would be inconsistent both with logic and good sense, *to take that for an ultimate principle, which forces our belief by its own intrinsic evidence, and which cannot by any reasoning be rendered more evident.*

## SECT. II.

IN natural philosophy, the evidence of sense and mathematical evidence go hand in hand ; and the one produces conviction as effectually as the other. A natural philosopher would make a poor figure, should he take it in his head to disbelieve or distrust the evidence of his senses. The time was, indeed, when matters were on a different footing ;

profitable and absurd ; and because, with all its absurdity, it has been approved and admired by sciolists, fops, and profligates ; and been the occasion of much evil to individuals, and of much detriment as well as danger to society.

when physical truths were made out, not by experiment and observation, but by dint of syllogism, or in the more compendious way of *ipse dixit*. But natural philosophy was then, what the philosophy of the mind in the hands of our sceptics is now, a system of sophisms, contrived for the vindication of false theories.

That natural philosophers never question the evidence of sense, nor seek either to disprove or to correct it by reasoning, is a position, which to many may at first sight seem disputable. I foresee several objections, but shall content myself with examining two of the most important. And these I shall set in such a light, as will, I hope, show them to be inconclusive, and at the same time preclude all other objections.

1. Do we not, (it will be said), both in our physical observations, and in the common affairs of life, reject the evidence of sight in regard to the magnitude, extension, figure and distance of visible objects, and trust to that of touch, which we know to be less fallacious? I see two buildings on the top of yonder mountain; they seem to my eyes to be only three or four feet asunder, of a round shape, and not larger than my two thumbs: but I have been at the place, and having ascertained their distance, size and figure, by touch or mensuration, I know, that they are square towers, forty yards asunder, and fifty feet high. Do I not in this case reject the evidence of my sight as fallacious, and trust to that of touch? And what is it but reason that induces me to do so? How then can it be said, that from the evidence of sense there is no appeal to reason?—It will, however, be easy to show, that in this instance we distrust neither sight nor touch, but believe implicitly in both; not because we can confirm their evidence by reasoning, but because



the law of our nature will not permit us to disbelieve their evidence.

Do you perceive these two objects when you shut your eyes? No.—It is, then, by your sight only that you perceive them? It is.—Does your sight perceive any thing in these two objects, but a certain visible magnitude, extension and figure? No. Do you believe that these towers really appear to your eyes round, three feet asunder, and of the size of your thumbs? Yes, I believe they have that appearance to my eyes.—And do you not also believe that, to the eyes of all men who see as you do, and look at these objects from the place in which you now stand, they have the very same appearance? I have no reason to think otherwise.—You believe, then, that the visible magnitude, distance and shape, of these towers, is what it appears to be? or do you think that your eyes see wrong? Be sure, the visible magnitude, figure and distance, are not different from what I perceive them to be.—But how do you know that what you perceive by sight either exists, or is what it appears to be? Not by reasoning, but by instinct.

Of the visible magnitude, extension, and figure, our eyes give us a true perception. It is a law of nature, That while visible objects retire from the eye, the visible magnitude becomes less as the distance becomes greater: and the proportion between the increasing distance and the decreasing visible magnitude is so well known, that the visible magnitude of any given object placed at a given distance, may be ascertained with geometrical exactness. The true visible magnitude of objects is therefore a fixed and determinate thing; that is, the visible magnitude of the same object, at the same distance, is always the same: we believe, that it is what our eyes perceive it to be; if we did not, the art of perspective would be impossible; at least we could

not acknowledge, that there is any truth in that art.

But the object (you reply) seems no bigger than your thumb; and you believe it to be fifty feet high; how is that sensation reconcileable with this belief? You may easily reconcile them, by recollecting, (what is obvious enough,) that the object of your belief is the tangible magnitude; that of your sensation, the visible. The visible magnitude is a perception of sense; and we have seen already, that it is conceived to be a true, and not a fallacious perception: the tangible magnitude you do not at present perceive by sense; you only remember it; or perhaps you infer it from the visible, in consequence of your knowledge of the laws of perspective. When we see a lump of salt at a little distance, we may perhaps take it for sugar. Is this a false sensation? is it a proof, either that our taste, or that our sight is fallacious? No: this is only an erroneous opinion formed upon a true sensation. A false sensation we cannot suppose it to be, without supposing that tastes are perceived by the eyes. And you cannot believe your opinion of the magnitude of these towers to be a false sensation, except you believe that tangible qualities are perceived by sight. When we speak of the magnitude of objects, we generally mean the tangible magnitude, which is no more an object of sight than of hearing. For it is demonstrated in optics, that a person endued with sight, but so fettered from his birth as to have no opportunity of gaining experience by touch, could never form any distinct notion of the distance, extension, magnitude, or figure of any thing. These are perceptions, not of sight, but of touch. We judge of them indeed from the visible appearance; but it is only in consequence of our having found, that certain changes in the visible appearance do always accompany, and intimate, cer-



tain changes in the tangible distance, magnitude, and figure. Visible magnitude, and tangible magnitude are quite different things; the former changes with every change of distance, the latter is always the same; the one is perceived by one sense, the other by another. So that when you say, I see a tower two miles off, which appears no bigger than my thumb, and yet I believe it to be a thousand times bigger than my whole body;—your sensation is perfectly consistent with your belief: the contrariety is merely verbal; for the word *bigger*, in the first clause refers to visible, in the second, to tangible magnitude. There is here no more real inconsistency than if you were to say, I see a conical body of a white colour, and I believe it to have a sweet taste. If there be any difficulty in conceiving this, it must arise from our being more apt to confound the objects of sight and touch, than those of any other two senses. As the knowledge of tangible qualities is of more consequence to our happiness and preservation, than the knowledge of visible appearances which in themselves can do neither good nor harm; we fix our principal attention on the tangible magnitude, the visible appearance serving only as a sign by which we judge of it: the mind makes an instantaneous transition from the visible appearance, which it overlooks, to the tangible quality, on which it fixeth its attention; and the sign is as little attended to, in comparison of the thing signified, as the shape of written characters, or the sound of articulate voices, in comparison of the ideas which the writer or speaker means to communicate.

But all men (it may be said) do not thus distinguish between visible and tangible magnitude. Many philosophers have affirmed, and the vulgar still believe, that magnitude is a sensation both of sight and touch: those people, therefore, when sen-

sible of the diminished visible appearance of the distant object, must suppose, that the perception they receive by sight of the magnitude of that object, is really a false perception ; because different from what they should receive by touch, or even by sight, if the object were within three yards of their eyes. At any rate, they must suppose, that what their sight perceives concerning magnitudes, is not always to be depended on ; and therefore that their sight is a fallacious faculty.

Let this objection have as much weight as you please ; yet will it not prove, that the evidence of sense may be either confirmed or confuted by reason. Suppose then I perceive real magnitude, both by sight and touch. I observe, that what my sight perceives of magnitude is not always consistent, either with itself, or with the sensations received by touch from the same object. The same man, within the same hour, appears six feet high, and not one foot high, according as I view him at the distance of two yards or of two miles. What is to be done in this case ? both sensations I cannot believe ? for that the man really changes his stature, is altogether incredible. I believe his stature to be always the same ; and I find, that to my touch it always appears the same ; and that, when I look at the man at the distance of a few feet, my visible perception of his magnitude coincides with my tangible perception. I must therefore believe, that what my sight intimates concerning the magnitude of distant objects is not to be depended on. But whence arises this belief ? Can I prove, by argument, that the man does not change his stature ? that the sense, whose perceptions are all consistent, is a true, and not a fallacious faculty ? or that a sense is not fallacious, when its perceptions coincide with the perceptions of another sense ? No, I can prove none of these points. It is instinct, and not reason, that de-



termines me to believe my touch ; it is instinct, and not reason, that determines me to believe, that visible sensations, when consistent with tangible, are not fallacious ; and it is either instinct, or reasoning founded on experience, (that is, on the evidence of sense), that determines me to believe the man's stature a permanent, and not a changeable thing. The evidence of sense is therefore decisive ; from it there is no appeal to reason : and if I were to become sceptical in regard to it, I should believe neither the one sense nor the other ; and of all experience, and experimental reasoning, I should become equally distrustful.

As the experience of an undiscerning or careless spectator may be confirmed, or corrected, by that of one who is more attentive, or more sagacious, so the evidence of an imperfect sense may be corrected by that of another sense which we conceive to be more perfect. But the evidence of sense can never be corrected by any reasoning, except by that which proceeds on a supposition, that our senses are not fallacious. And all our notions concerning the perfection or imperfection of sense are either instinctive, and therefore principles of common sense ; or founded in experience, and therefore ultimately resolvable into this maxim, That things are what our senses represent them.

Lucretius is much puzzled (as his master Epicurus had been before him) about the degree of credit due to our visible perceptions of magnitude. He justly enough observes, that no principle can be confuted, except by another more evident principle ; and, therefore, that the testimony of sense, than which nothing is more evident, cannot be confuted at all\* : that the testimony of the nostrils con-

\* See Diogenes Laertius, book 10.—Lucretius de rerum natura, lib. 4. ver. 480. This author had sagacity enough to

cerning odour cannot be corrected or refuted by that of the eye, nor the eye by the ear, nor the ear by the touch, nor the touch by the taste ; because each of these senses hath a set of objects peculiar to itself, of which the other senses cannot judge, because, indeed, they cannot perceive them. All this is very well ; but there is one thing wanting, which I should think obvious enough, even to one of Epicurean principles. Of taste we judge by the palate only ; of smell, by the nostrils only ; of sound, by the ears only ; of colours, by the sight only ; of hardness, softness, heat, cold, &c. by the touch only ; but of magnitude we judge both by sight and touch. In regard to magnitude, we must therefore believe either our sight, or our touch, or both, or neither. To believe neither is impossible : if we believe both, we shall contradict ourselves : if we trust our sight, and not our touch, our belief at one time will be inconsistent with our belief at another ; we shall think the same man six

perceive the absurdity of Pyrrhonism, and to make several judicious remarks on the nature of evidence. But in applying these to his own theory, every one knows that he is by no means consistent. The poem of Lucretius is a melancholy spectacle ; it is the picture of a great genius in a state of lunacy. Except when the whim of his sect comes across his imagination, he argues with propriety, perspicuity, and elegance. Pathos of sentiment, sweetness of style, harmony of numbers, and a beauty, and sometimes a majesty of description, not unworthy of Virgil, render his poem highly amusing, in spite of its absurd philosophy. A talent for extensive observation he seems to have possessed in an extraordinary degree ; but wherever the peculiar tenets of Epicureanism are concerned, he sees every thing through a false medium. So fatal is the admission of wrong principles. Persons of the most exalted understanding have as much need to guard against them, as those of the meanest capacity. If they are so imprudent, or so unfortunate as to adopt them, their superior genius, like the strength of a madman, will serve no other purpose than to involve them in greater difficulties, and give them the power of doing more mischief.



feet high, and not one foot high: we must therefore believe our touch, if we would exert any consistent belief in regard to magnitude.

2. But do we not, in physical experiments, acknowledge the deceitfulness of sense, when we have recourse to the telescope and microscope; and when, in order to analyze light, which, to our unassisted sight, appears one uniform uncompounded thing, we transmit the rays of it through a prism? I answer, this implies the *imperfection*, not the *deceitfulness* of sense. For if I suppose my sight fallacious, I can no more trust it, when assisted by a telescope or microscope, than when unassisted. I cannot prove, that things are as they appear to my unassisted sight; and I can as little prove, that things are as they appear to my sight assisted by glasses.

But is it not agreeable to common sense to believe, that light is one uniform uncompounded thing? and if so, is not common sense in an error? and what can rectify this error but reasoning?—I answer, it is undeniable, that light to the unassisted eye appears uncompounded and uniform. If from this I infer, that light is precisely what it appears to be, I form a wrong judgment, which I may afterwards rectify, upon the evidence of sense, when I see a ray of light transmitted through a prism. Here an error of judgment, or a false inference of reason, is rectified by my trusting to the evidence of sense: to which evidence, instinct, or common sense determines me to trust.

But is it not common sense that leads me to form this wrong judgment? Do not all mankind naturally, and previously to all influence from education, judge in the same manner? Did not all philosophers before Newton, and do not all the unlearned to this day, believe that light is a simple fluid?—I answer, Common Sense teacheth me,

and all mankind, to trust to experience: Experience tells us, that our unassisted sight, though sufficiently acute for the ordinary purposes of life, is not acute enough to discern the minute texture of visible objects. If notwithstanding this experience, we believe, that the minute texture of light, or of any other visible substance, is nothing different from that appearance which we perceive by the naked eye; then our belief contradicts our experience, and consequently is inconsistent with common sense.

But what if you have had no experience sufficient to convince you, that your senses are not acute enough to discern the texture of the minute parts of bodies?—Then it is certain, that I can never attain this conviction by mere reasoning. If a man were to reason *a priori* about the nature of light, he might chop logic till dooms-day, before he convinced me, that light is compounded of rays of seven different colours. But if he tell me of experiments which he has made, or which he knows to have been made, this is quite another matter. I believe his testimony, and it makes up for my own want of experience. When I confide in his veracity, I conceive, and believe, that his senses communicated a true perception; and that, if I had been in his place, I should also have been convinced, by the evidence of my sense, that light is truly compounded of rays of seven different colours. But I must repeat, that a supposition of my senses being fallacious, would render me wholly inaccessible to conviction, both on the one side and on the other.

Suppose a man, on seeing the coloured rays thrown off from the prism, should think the whole a delusion, and owing to the nature of the medium through which the light is transmitted, not to the nature of the light itself; and should tell me, that



he could as easily believe my face to be of a green colour, because it has that appearance when viewed through a pair of green spectacles, as that every ray of light consists of seven distinct colours, because it has that appearance when transmitted through a prism:—would it be possible to get the better of this prejudice, without reasoning? I answer, it would not: but the reasoning used must all depend upon experiments; every one of which must be rejected, if the testimony of sense be not admitted as decisive. I could think of several expedients, in the way of appeals to sense, by which it might be possible to reconcile him to the Newtonian theory of light; but, in the way of argument, I cannot devise a single one.

On an imperfect view of nature, false opinions may be formed: but these may be rectified by a more perfect view; or, which in many cases will amount to the same thing, by the testimony of those who have obtained a more perfect view. The powers of man operate only within a certain sphere; and till an object be brought within that sphere, it is impossible for them to perceive it. I see a small object, which I know to be a man at the distance of half a mile; but cannot discern his complection, whether it be black or fair; nor the colour of his clothes, whether it be brown, or black, or blue; nor his nose, whether it be long or short: I cannot even discern whether he has any nose at all: and his whole body seems to be of one uniform black colour. Perhaps I am so foolish as to infer, that therefore the man has no nose: that his clothes are black, and his face of the colour of his clothes. On going up to him, I discover that he is a handsome man, of a fair complexion, dressed in blue. Surely it is not reasoning that sets me right in this instance; but it is a perfect view of an object that rectifies a wrong opinion formed upon an imperfect view.

I hear the sound of a musical instrument at a distance; but hear it so faintly, that I cannot determine whether it be that of a trumpet, a hautboy, a German flute, a French horn, or a common flute. I want to know from what instrument the sound proceeds; and I have no opportunity of knowing from the information of others. Shall I stand still where I am, and reason about it? no; that would make me no wiser. I go forward to the place from whence the sound seems to come: and by and by I can perceive, that the sound is different from that of a French horn and of a trumpet: but as yet I cannot determine whether it be the sound of a hautboy or of a flute. I go on a little further, and now I plainly distinguish the sound of a flute; but perhaps I shall not be able to know whether it be a German or common flute, except by means of my other senses, that is, by handling or looking at it.

It is needless to multiply instances for illustrating the difference between a perfect and an imperfect view of an object, and for shewing, that the mind trusts to the former, but distrusts the latter. For obtaining a perfect view, (or perfect perception), we sometimes employ the same sense in a nearer situation; sometimes we make use of instruments, as ear-trumpets, spectacles, microscopes, telescopes; sometimes we have recourse to the testimony of our other senses, or of the senses of other men: in a word, we rectify or ascertain the evidence of sense by the evidence of sense: but we never subject the evidence of sense to the cognisance of reason: for in sensations that are imperfect or indistinct, reasoning could neither supply what is deficient, nor ascertain what is indefinite.

Our internal, as well as external senses, may be, and often are, imposed upon, by inaccurate views of their objects. We may in sincerity of heart ap-



plaud, and afterwards condemn the same person for the same action, according to the different lights in which that action is presented to our moral faculty. Just now I hear a report, that a human body is found dead in the neighbouring fields, with marks of violence upon it. Here a confused suspicion arises in my mind of murder committed; but my conscience suspends its judgment till the true state of the case be better known: I am not as yet in a condition to perceive those qualities of this event which ascertain the morality of the action; no more than I can perceive the beauty or deformity of a face while it is veiled, or at too great distance. A passenger informs me, that a person has been apprehended who confesses himself the murderer; my moral faculty instantly suggests, that this person has committed a crime worthy of a most severe and exemplary punishment. By and by I learn, from what I think good authority, that my former information is false, for that the man now dead had made an unprovoked assault on the other, who was thus driven to the necessity of killing him in self-defence; my conscience immediately acquits the man-slayer. I send a messenger to make particular enquiry into this affair; who brings word that the man was accidentally killed by a fowler shooting at a bird, who before he fired, had been at all possible pains to discover whether any human creature was in the way; but that the deceased was in such a situation that he could not be discovered. I regret the accident; but I blame neither party. Afterwards I learn, that this fowler was a careless fellow, and though he had no bad intention, was not at due pains to observe whether any human creature would be hurt by his firing. I blame his negligence with great severity, but I cannot charge him with guilt so enormous as that of murder. Here my moral faculty passes

several different judgments on *the same action*; and each of them is right, and will be in its turn believed to be right, and trusted to accordingly, as long as the information which gave rise to it is believed to be true. I say *the same action*, not *the same intention*; a different intention appears in the man-slayer from each information; and it is only the intention and affections that the moral faculty condemns or approves. To discover the intention wherewith actions are performed, reasoning is often necessary; but the design of such reasoning, is not to sway or inform the conscience, but only to ascertain those circumstances or qualities of the action, from which the intention of the agent may appear. When this becomes manifest, the conscience of mankind immediately and intuitively declares it to be virtuous, or vitious, or innocent.—These different judgments of the moral faculty are so far from proving it fallacious, that they prove the contrary: at least this faculty would be extremely fallacious, and absolutely useless, if, in the case now supposed, it did not form different judgments.—While the intention of the agent is wholly unknown, an action is upon the same footing in regard to its morality, as a human face, in regard to its beauty, while it is veiled, or at too great distance. By removing the veil, or walking up to the object, we perceive its beauty and features; and by reasoning, or by information concerning the circumstances of the action, we are enabled to discover or infer the intention of the agent. The act of removing the veil, or of walking up to the object, has no effect on the eye; nor has the reasoning any effect on the conscience.—While we view an object through an impure or unequal medium, through a pair of green spectacles, or an uneven pane of glass, we see it discoloured or distorted; just so, when misrepresented, a good action may seem evil, and an evil action good.



If we be suspicious of the representation, if we be aware of the improper medium, we distrust the appearance accordingly; if not, we do, and must believe it genuine. It is by reasoning from our experience of human actions and their causes, or by the testimony of credible witnesses, that we detect misrepresentations concerning moral conduct; and it is also by the experience of our own senses, or by our belief in those who have had such experience, that we become sensible of inequalities or obscurities in the medium through which we contemplate visible objects. In either case the evidence of sense is admitted as finally decisive. A distempered sense, as well as an impure or unequal medium, may doubtless communicate false sensations; but we are never imposed upon by them in matters of consequence. A person in a fever may think honey bitter, and the smell of a rose offensive; but the delusion is of so short continuance, and of so singular a kind, that it can do no harm, either to him, or to the cause of truth. To a jaundiced eye, the whole creation may seem tinged with yellow; but the patient's former experience, and his belief in the testimony of others, who assure him, that they perceive no alteration in the colour of bodies, and that the alteration he perceives is a common attendant on his disease, will sufficiently guard him against mistakes. If he were to distrust the evidence of sense, he could believe neither his own experience nor their testimony. He corrects, or at least becomes sensible of the false sensation, by means of sensations formerly received when he was in health; that is, he corrects the evidence of an ill-informed sense by that of a well-informed sense, or by the declaration of those whose senses he believes to be better informed than his own. Still it is plain, that from the evidence of sense there can be no appeal to reason.

We conclude, therefore, that in natural philosophy our sensations are not supposed fallacious, and that reasoning is not carried beyond the principles of common sense. And yet in this science full scope is given to impartial investigation. If, after the first experimental process, you suspect that the object may be set in a still fairer light, I know no law in logic, or in good sense, that can or ought to hinder you from making a new trial: but if this new trial turn to no account; if the object still appear the same, or if it appear less distinct than before, it were folly not to remain satisfied with the first trial. Newton transmitted one of the refracted primitive colours through a second prism, thinking it not impossible that this colour might resolve itself into other still more simple, but finding it remain unaltered, he was satisfied that the primitive colours are not compounded, but simple, and that the experimental process had already been carried far enough.—I take in my hand a perspective glass, whose tube may be lengthened and shortened at pleasure; and I am to find out by my own industry, that precise length at which the maker designed it should be used in looking at distant objects. I make several trials to no purpose; the distant object appears not at all, or but very confusedly. I hold one end of the perspective at my eye with one hand, and with the other I gradually shorten the tube, having first drawn it out to its greatest length. At first all is confusion; now I can discern the inequalities of the mountains in the horizon; now the object I am in quest of begins to appear; it becomes less and less confused; I see it distinctly. I continue to shorten the tube; the object loses its distinct appearance, and begins to relapse into its former obscurity. After many trials, I find that my perspective exhibits no distinct appearance except



when it is of one particular length. Here then I fix; I have adjusted the glasses according to the intention of the maker; and I believe that the distinct appearance is an accurate representation of the distant object, or at least more accurate than any of the confused appearances; of which I believe, that they come the nearer to truth, the more they approach to distinctness, and that the most confused representations are the most false.

It was not by reasoning about the fallacy of the senses, and prosecuting a train of argument beyond the principles of common sense, that men discovered the true system of the world. In the earlier ages, when they imagined the sun to be little bigger than the mountain beyond which he disappeared, it was absurd to think of the earth revolving round him. But in process of time, ingenious men, who applied themselves to the observation of the heavenly bodies, not with a view to confute popular errors, for they could not as yet even suspect the vulgar opinion to be erroneous, but merely to gratify their own laudable curiosity, began to conceive more exalted notions of the mundane system. They soon distinguished the planets from the fixed stars, by observing the former to be more variable in their appearances. After a long succession of years, employed, not in reasoning, but attentive observation, they came at last to understand the motions of the sun and moon so well, that, to the utter astonishment of the vulgar, they began to calculate eclipses: a degree of knowledge they could not attain, without being convinced, that the sun and moon are very large bodies, placed at very great distances from the earth, the former much larger, and more remote than the latter. Thus far it is impossible to shew, that any reasoning had been employed by those ancient astronomers, either to prove or to disprove, the evi-

dence of the senses. On the contrary, they must all along have taken it for granted, that the senses are not fallacious; supposing only, (what it is certainly agreeable to common sense to suppose), that the experience of a diligent observer is more to be depended on, than that of the inattentive multitude.

As men grew more and more acquainted with the motions and appearances of the heavenly bodies, they became more and more sensible, that the sun, earth, and planets, bear some very peculiar relation to one another: and having learned from the phenomena of eclipses, and some other natural appearances, that the sun is bigger than the earth\*, they might, without absurdity, begin to suspect, that possibly the sun might be the centre round which the earth, and other planets revolve; especially, considering the magnificence of that glorious luminary, and the wonderful and delightful effects produced by the influence of his beams, while at the same time he seems not to derive any advantage from the earth, or other planets. But if the matter had been carried no further, no reasoning from these circumstances could ever have amounted to a proof of the point in question, though it might breed a faint presumption in its favour. For still the evidence of sense seemed to contradict it; an evidence which nothing can disprove, but the evidence of sense placed in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation. The invention of optical glasses did at last furnish the

\* Heraclitus maintained, that the sun is but a foot broad; Anaxagoras, that he is much larger than the country of Peloponnesus; and Epicurus, that he is no bigger than he appears to the eye. But the astronomers of antiquity maintained that he is bigger than the earth; eight times, according to the Egyptians; eightentimes, according to Eratosthenes; three hundred times, according to Cleomedes; one thousand and fifty times, according to Hipparchus; and fifty-nine thousand three hundred and nineteen times, according to Possidonius.



means of making experiments with regard to this matter, and of putting man in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation; and thus the point was brought to the test of common sense. And now, we not only know, that the Copernican theory is true, for every person who understands it is convinced of its truth; but we also know to what causes the universal belief of the contrary doctrine is to be ascribed. We know that men, considering the remote situation of our earth, and the imperfection of our senses, could not have judged otherwise than they did, till that imperfection was remedied, either by accuracy of observation, or by the invention of optical instruments. We speak not of revelation; which has indeed been vouchsafed to man for the regulation of his moral conduct; but which it would be presumption to expect or desire, merely for the gratification of curiosity.

It is evident, from what has been said, that in natural philosophy, as well as in mathematics, no argumentation is prosecuted beyond self-evident principles; that as in the latter all reasoning terminates in intuition, so in the former all reasoning terminates in the evidence of sense. And as, in mathematics, that is accounted an intuitive axiom, which is of itself so clear and evident, that it cannot be illustrated or enforced by any medium of proof, and which must be believed, and is in fact believed by all on its own authority; so, in natural philosophy, that is accounted an ultimate principle, undeniable and unquestionable, which is supported by the evidence of a well-informed sense, placed so as to perceive its object. In mathematics, that is accounted false doctrine which is inconsistent with any self-evident principle; in natural philosophy, that is rejected which contradicts matter of fact, or, in other words, which is repugnant to the

appearances of things as perceived by external sense.

Regulated by this criterion of truth, mathematics and natural philosophy have become of all sciences the most respectable in point of certainty. Hence I am encouraged to hope, that if the same criterion were universally adopted in the philosophy of the mind, the science of human nature, instead of being, as at present, a chaos of uncertainty and contradiction, would acquire a considerable degree of certainty, perspicuity, and order. If truth be at all attainable in this science, (and if it is not attainable, why should we trouble our heads about it?) surely it must be attained by the same means as in those other sciences. For of the eternal relations and fitnesses of things, we know nothing: all that we know of truth and falsehood is, that our constitution determines us in some cases to believe, in others to disbelieve; and that to us is truth which we feel that we must believe; and that to us is falsehood which we feel that we must disbelieve\*. There are innumerable truths with which we are wholly unacquainted; there are perhaps some truths which we reject as falsehood; but, surely, we must both know and believe a truth before we can acknowledge it as such: and belief is nothing but a perception, or, if you please, an action of the mind, the peculiar nature of which we all know by internal feeling or consciousness, and cannot possibly know in any other way.

I therefore would propose, "That in the philosophy of human nature, as well as in physics and mathematics, principles be examined according to the standard of common sense, and be admitted or rejected as they are found to agree or disagree with it:" more explicitly, "That those doctrines be rejected which contradict matter of fact, that is,

\* See the next section.



which are repugnant to the appearances of things; as perceived by external and internal sense; and that those principles be accounted ultimate, undeniable, and unquestionable, which are warranted by the evidence of a well-informed sense, placed in circumstances favourable to a distinct perception of its object."

But what do you mean by a *well informed sense*? How shall I know, that any particular faculty of mine is not defective, depraved, or fallacious?—Perhaps it is not easy, at least it would furnish matter for too long a digression, to give a full answer to this question. Nor is it at present necessary; because it will appear in the sequel, that, however difficult it may be in some cases to distinguish a first principle, yet there are certain marks, by which those reasonings that tend to the subversion of a first principle, may be detected, at least in all cases of importance. However, we shall offer a remark or two in answer to the question; which, though they should not appear perfectly unexceptionable, may yet throw light on the subject, and serve to prepare the mind of the reader for some things that are to follow.

First, then, if I wanted to certify myself concerning any particular sense or percipient faculty, that it is neither depraved nor defective, I should attend to the feelings or sensations communicated by it; and observe whether they be clear and definite, and such as I am, of my own accord, disposed to confide in without hesitation, as true, genuine, and natural. If they are such, I should certainly act upon them till I had some positive reason to think them fallacious.—Secondly, I consider, whether the sensations received by this faculty be uniformly similar in similar circumstances: if they are not, I should suspect, either that it is now depraved, or was formerly so; and if I had no other criterion to direct me, should be much at a loss to know whether I

ought to trust the former or the latter experience ; perhaps I should distrust both. If they are uniform, if my present and my past experience do exactly coincide, I shall then be disposed to think them both right.—Thirdly, I consider, whether, in acting upon the supposition that the faculty in question is well-informed, I have ever been misled to my hurt or inconvenience ; if not, then have I good reason to think, that I was not mistaken when I formed that supposition, and that this faculty is really what I supposed it to be.—Fourthly, If the sensations communicated by this faculty be incompatible with one another, or irreconcilable to the perceptions of my other faculties, I should suspect a depravation of the former : for the laws of nature, as far as my experience goes, are consistent ; and I have a natural tendency to believe that they are universally so. It is therefore a presumption, that my faculties are well-informed, when the perceptions of one are quite consistent with those of the rest, and with one another.—In a state of solitude I must satisfy myself with these *criteria* ; but in society I have access to another criterion, which in many cases, will be reckoned more decisive than any of these, and which, in concurrence with these, will be sufficient to banish doubt from every rational mind. I compare my sensations and notions with those of other men ; and if I find a perfect coincidence, I shall then be satisfied that my sensations are according to the law of human nature, and therefore right.—To illustrate all this by an example :

I want to know whether my sense of seeing be a well-informed faculty.—First, I have reason to think that it is : because my eyes communicate to me such sensations as I, of my own accord, am disposed to confide in. There is something in my perceptions of sight so distinct, and so definite,



that I do not find myself in the least disposed to doubt whether things be what my eyes represent them. Even the obscurer informations of this faculty carry along with them their own evidence, and my belief. I am confident, that the sun and moon are round, as they appear to be, that the rainbow is arched, that grass is green, snow white, and the heavens azure ; and this I should have believed, though I had passed all my days in solitude, and never known any thing of other animals, or their senses.—Secondly, I find that my notions of the visible qualities of bodies are the same now they have always been. If this were not the case ; if where I saw greenness yesterday I were to see yellow to-day, I should be apt to suppose, that my sight had suffered some depravation, except I had reason to think, that the object had really changed colour. But indeed we have so strong a tendency to believe our senses, that I doubt not but in such a case I should be more disposed to suspect a change in the object than in my eye-sight: much would depend on the circumstances of the case. We rub our eyes when we want to look at any thing with accuracy; for we know by experience, that motes, and cloudy specks, which may be removed by rubbing, do sometimes float in the eye, and hurt the sight. But if the alteration of the visible qualities in the external object be such as we have never experienced from a depravation of the organ, we should be inclined to trust our eye-sight, rather than to suppose that the external object has remained unaltered.—Thirdly, no evil consequence has ever happened to me when acting upon the supposition, that my faculty of seeing is a well informed sense: whereas, if I were to act on the contrary supposition, I should soon have cause to regret my scepticism. I see a post in my way ; by turning a little aside, I pass it unhurt: but if I had supposed my

sight fallacious, and gone straight forward, a bloody nose, or something worse, might have been the consequence. If, when I bend my course obliquely in order to avoid the post that seems to stand directly before me, I were to run my head full against it, I should instantly suspect a depravation in my eye-sight: but as I never experience any misfortune of this kind, I believe that my sense of seeing is a well-informed faculty.—Fourthly, the perceptions received by this sense are perfectly consistent with one another, and with the perceptions received by my other faculties. When I see the appearance of a solid body in my way, my touch always confirms the testimony of my sight; if it did not, I should suspect a fallacy in one or other of those senses, perhaps in both. When I look on a line of soldiers, they all seem standing perpendicular, as I myself stand; but if the men at the extremities of the line, without leaning against any thing, were to appear as if they formed an angle of forty-five degrees with the earth's surface, I should suspect some unaccountable obliquity in my vision.—Lastly, after the experience of several years, after all the knowledge I have been able to gather, concerning the sensations of other men, from reading, discourse, and observation, I have no reason to think their sensations of sight different from mine. Every body who uses the English language, calls snow white, and grass green; and it would be in the highest degree absurd to suppose, that what they call the sensation of whiteness, is not the same sensation which I call by that name. Some few, perhaps, see differently from me. A man in the jaundice sees that rose yellow which I see red; a short-sighted man sees that picture confusedly at the distance of three yards, which I see distinctly. But far the greater part of mankind see as I do, and differently from those few individuals; whose



sense of seeing I therefore consider as less perfect than mine. Nay, though the generality of mankind were short-sighted, still it would be true, that we, who are not so, have the most perfect sight ; for our sight is more accurate in its perceptions, qualifies us better for the business of life, and coincides more exactly, or at least more immediately, with the sensations received by the other senses. Yet the short-sighted, as well as they who have the acutest sight, trust to this sense, as soon as they are placed in a situation favourable to accurate observation: all the difference is, that it is more difficult, and often more inconvenient, for short-sighted persons to place themselves in such a situation. Still it should be remembered that a *perfect sense* and a *well-informed sense* are not synonymous terms. We call a sense *well-informed*, in opposition to one that is *depraved* or *fallacious*. *Perfection* and *imperfection* of sense are relative terms ; implying a comparison, either between different men, in respect of the acuteness of their senses and faculties ; or between any sense, as it appears in a particular man, and the degree of acuteness which is found to belong to that sense as it appears in the generality of mankind. There are two telescopes, one of which gives a distinct view of an object at two, and the other at four miles distance ; both are equally *well-informed*, (if I may so speak) ; that is, equally true in their representations ; but the one is much more *imperfect* than the other.

I do not, at present, offer any further illustrations of these *criteria* of a well-informed sense. The reader who examines them by the rules of common prudence, will perhaps be satisfied with them : at least I am apt to think, that few will suspect the veracity of their faculties when they stand this test. But let it not be supposed, that I mean to insinuate, that a man never trusts his faculties till he first

examine them after this manner: we believe our senses previously to all reflection or examination; and we never disbelieve them, but upon the authority of our senses placed in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation.

‘ If the reader is not satisfied with these *criteria*, it is no great matter. The question concerning a well-informed sense it is not perhaps easy to answer. I offer these remarks rather as hints to be attended to by other adventurers in this part of science, than as a complete solution of the difficulty. If it were not that I presume some advantage may be derived from them in this way, I should have omitted them altogether; for on them does not depend the doctrine I mean to establish.

### SECT. III.

*The subject continued. Intuitive truths distinguishable into classes.*

OF the notions attending the perception of certain truth, we formerly mentioned this as one, “That in regard to such truth, we suppose we should entertain the same sentiments and belief if we were perfectly acquainted with all nature\*.” Lest it should be thought that we mean to extend this notion too far, it seems proper to introduce here the following remarks.

1. The axioms and demonstrated conclusions of geometry are certainly true, and certainly agreeable to the nature of things. Thus we judge of them at present; and thus we necessarily believe, that we should judge of them, even if we were endued with omniscience and infallibility. It is a natural dictate

\* See part 1. chap. 1.



of human understanding, that the contrary of these truths must for ever remain absurd and impossible, and that omnipotence itself cannot change their nature; though it might so deprave our judgment as to make us disbelieve or not perceive them\*.

2. That my body exists, and is endued with a thinking, active, and permanent principle, which I call my soul;—That the material world hath such an existence as the vulgar ascribe to it, that is, a real separate existence, to which its being perceived is in no wise necessary:—That the men, beasts, houses, and mountains, we see and feel around us, are not imaginary, but real and material beings, and such, in respect of shape and tangible magnitude, as they appear to our senses; I am not only conscious that I believe, but also certain, that such is the nature of these things, and that, thus far at least, in regard to the nature of these things, an omniscient and infallible being cannot think me mis-

\* Some authors are of opinion, that all mathematical truth is resolvable into identical propositions. The following remark to this purpose is taken from a Dissertation on Evidence, printed at Berlin in the year 1764. “*Omnes mathematicorum propositiones sunt identicæ, et repræsentantur hac formula,  $a=a$ . Sunt veritates identicæ, sub varia forma expressæ, imo ipsum, quod dicitur, contradictionis principium, vario modo enunciatum et involutum; siquidem omnes hujus generis propositiones revera in eo contineantur. Secundum nostram autem intelligendi facultatem ea est propositionum differentia, quod quædam longa ratiociniorum serie, alia autem breviori via, ad primum omnium principium reducantur, et in illud resolvantur. Sic. v. g. propositio  $2+2=4$ , statim huc cedit  $1+1+1+1=1+1+1+1$ , i. e. idem; et, proprie loquendo, hoc modo enunciari debet.—Si contingat, adesse vel existere quatuor entia; tum existunt quatuor entia; nam de existentia non agunt geometræ, sed ea hypothetice tantum subintelligitur. Inde summa oritur certitudo ratiocinia perspicienti; observat nempe idearum identitatem; et hæc est evidentia, assensum immediate cogens, quam mathematicam aut geometricam vocamus. Mathesi tamen sua natura priva non est et propria; oritur etenim ex identitatis perceptione, quæ locum habere potest, etiamsi ideæ non repræsentent extensum.*”

taken. Of these truths I am so certain, that I scruple not to pronounce every being in an error who is of a contrary sentiment concerning them. For suppose an intelligent creature, an angel for instance, to believe that there are not in the universe any such things as this solar system, this earth, these mountains, houses, animals, this being whom I call myself; could I, by any effort, bring myself to believe, that his opinion is a true one, and implies a proposition expressive of something agreeable to the nature of things? It is impossible and inconceivable. My understanding intimates, that such an opinion would as certainly be false, as it is false that two and two are equal to ten, or that things equal to one and the same thing are unequal to one another. Yet this is an opinion which omnipotence could render true, by annihilating the whole of this solar system; or make me admit as true, by depriving me of understanding. But so long as this solar system remains unannihilated, and my intellect undepraved, there is not a geometrical axiom more true, or more evident to me, than that this solar system, and all the objects above-mentioned, do exist; there is not a geometrical axiom that has any better title to be accounted a principle of human knowledge; there is not a geometrical axiom against which it is more absurd, more unreasonable, more unphilosophical, to argue.

3. That snow is white, fire hot, gold yellow, and sugar sweet, we believe, to be certainly true. These bodies affect our eyes, touch, and palate, in a peculiar manner; and we have no reason to think, that they affect the organs of different men in a different manner: on the contrary, we believe, with full assurance, founded on sufficient reason, that they affect the senses of all men in the same manner. The peculiar sensation we receive from them depends on three things; on the



nature of the object perceived, on the nature of the organ of perception, and on the nature of the percipient being. Of each of these things the Deity could change the nature; and make sugar bitter, fire cold, snow black, and gold green. But till this be done; in other words, while things continue as they are, it is as certainly true, that snow is white, fire hot, &c. as that two and two are equal to four, or a whole greater than a part. If we suppose, that snow, notwithstanding its appearance is black, or not white, we must also suppose, that our senses and intellect are fallacious faculties; and therefore cannot admit any thing as true which has no better evidence than that of sense and intellect. If a creature of a different nature from man were to say, that snow is black, and hot, I should reply, (supposing him to use these words in the same sense in which I use them), It may possibly have that appearance to your senses, but it has not that appearance to mine: it may therefore, in regard to your faculties be true; and if so, it ought to constitute a part of your philosophy: but of my philosophy it cannot constitute a part, because, in respect of my faculties, it is false, being contrary to fact and experience. If the same being were to affirm, that a part is equal to a whole, I should answer, it is impossible; none can think so but those who are destitute of understanding. If he were to say, the solar system explained by Newton does not exist, I should answer, you are mistaken; if your knowledge were not imperfect, you would think otherwise; I am certain that it does exist.—We see, by thus stating the case, what is the difference between these three sorts of certainty. But still in respect to man, these three sorts are all equally evident, equally certain, and equally unsusceptible of confutation: and none of them can be disbelieved or doubted by us, except we disa-

vow the distinction between truth and falsehood, by supposing our faculties fallacious.

4. Of moral truth, we cannot bring ourselves to think that the Deity's notions (pardon the expression) are contrary to ours. If we believe Him omniscient and infallible, can we also believe, that, in his sight, cruelty, injustice, and ingratitude, are worthy of reward and praise, and the opposite virtues of blame and punishment? It is absolutely impossible. The one belief destroys the other.—Common sense declares, that a being possessed of perfect knowledge, can no more entertain such a sentiment, than I with my eyes open can just now avoid seeing the light. If a created being were, in all cases, to think that virtue which we think vice, and that vice which we think virtue, what would be our notions of his intelligence? Should we not, without hesitation, pronounce him irrational, and his opinion an absurdity? The absurdity indeed is conceivable, and may be expressed in words that imply no contradiction: but that any being should think in this manner, and yet not think wrong, is to us as perfectly inconceivable as that the same thing should be both true and false\*.

We speak here of the great and leading principles of moral duty. Many subordinate duties there

\* Locke says that Moral Truth is susceptible of demonstration. If by this he means, that it admits of evidence sufficient to satisfy every rational mind, he is certainly in the right. But if by the word *demonstration* be meant, what Geometricians mean by it, a proof that may be resolved into one or more self-evident axioms, whose contraries are inconceivable, we confess that neither moral nor historical truth is susceptible of demonstration, nor many other truths of the most unquestionable certainty. However, it is not to be supposed, that Locke intended to use this word in any stricter sense than what is fixed by general practice; according to which, every proof that brings indubitable evidence to the reason or senses may properly be called a demonstration.



are, which result from the form of particular governments, and from particular modes of education; and there are some, which, though admirably adapted to the improvement and perfection of our nature, are yet so sublime, that the natural conscience of mankind, unassisted by revelation, can hardly be supposed capable of discovering them: but in regard to justice, gratitude, and those other virtues, of which no rational beings (so far as we know) are or can be ignorant, it is impossible for us to believe that our sentiments are wrong. I say, there are duties of which no rational beings can be ignorant: for if moral sentiments be the result of a bias, or *vis insita*, communicated to the rational soul by its Creator, then must they be as universal as rational nature, and as permanent as the effects of any other natural law; and it is as absurd to argue against their truth or authenticity, as against the reality of any other matter of fact. But several authors of note have denied this inference, as well as the principle whence it proceeds; or at least, by calling the one in question, have endeavoured to make us sceptical in regard to the other. They have endeavoured to prove, that moral sentiment is different in different countries, and under different forms of religion, government, and manners; that therefore, in respect of it, there is no *vis insita* in the mind; for that, previous to education, we are in a state of perfect indifference as to virtue and vice: and that an opposite course of education would have made us think that virtue which now we think vice, and that vice which now we think virtue; in a word, that moral sentiments are as much the effect of custom and human artifice, as our taste in dress, furniture, and the modes of conversation. In proof of this doctrine, a multitude of facts have been brought together, to show the prodigious diversity, and even contrariety,

that takes place in the moral opinions of different ages, nations, and climates. Of all our modern sceptical notions, this seemed to me one of the most dangerous. For my own satisfaction, and for the sake of those whom it is my duty to instruct, I have been at great pains to examine it; and the examination has turned out to my entire satisfaction. But the materials I have collected on this subject are far too bulky to be inserted here. The sceptical arguments are founded, not only on mistakes concerning the nature of virtue, but also on some historical facts mis-represented, and on others so equivocal, and bare of circumstances, that they really have no meaning. From the number of historical, as well as philosophical disquisitions, which I found it necessary to introduce, the inquiry concerning the universality and immutability of moral truth, which I thought to have comprised in a few pages, soon swelled into a treatise. I meant to have finished it some years ago; but have hitherto been prevented by a number of unforeseen accidents.

5. Of probable truth, a superior being may think differently from us, and yet be in the right. For every proposition is either true or false; and every probable past event has either happened, or not happened, as every probable future event will either happen or not happen. From the imperfection of our faculties, and from the narrowness of our experience, we may judge wrong, when we think that a certain event has happened or will happen: and a being of a more extensive experience, and more perfect understanding, may see that we judge wrong; for that the event in question never did happen, nor ever will. Yet it does not follow, that a man may either prudently or rationally distrust his probable notions as fallacious. That which man, by the constitution of his nature, is



determined to admit as probable, he ought to admit as probable; for, in regard to man, that is probable truth. Not to admit it probable, when at the same time he must believe it to be so, is mere obstinacy: and not to believe that probable, which all other men who have the same view of all the circumstances, believe probable, would be ascribed to caprice, or want of understanding. If one in such a case were refractory, we should naturally ask, How comes it, that you think differently from us in this matter? have you any reason to think us in a mistake? is your knowledge of the circumstances from which we infer the probability of this event, different from ours? do you know any thing about it, of which we are ignorant? If he reply in the negative, and yet persist in contradicting our opinion, we should certainly think him an unreasonable man. Every thing, therefore, which to human creatures seems intuitively probable, is to be accounted one of the first principles of probable human knowledge. A human creature acts an irrational part when he argues against it; and if he refuse to acknowledge it probable, he cannot, without contradicting himself, acquiesce in any other human probability whatsoever.

It appears from what has been said, that there are various kinds of intuitive certainty; and that those who will not allow any truth to be self-evident, except what has all the characteristics of a geometrical axiom, are much mistaken. From the view we have given of this subject, it would be easy to reduce these intuitive certainties into classes; but this is not necessary on the present occasion. We are here treating of the nature and immutability of truth as perceived by human faculties. Whatever intuitive proposition man, by the law of his nature, must believe as certain, or as probable, is, in regard to him, certain or probable

truth; and must constitute a part of human knowledge, and remain unalterably the same, as long as the human constitution remains unaltered. And we must often repeat, that he who attempts to disprove such intuitive truth, or to make men sceptical in regard to it, acts a part as inconsistent with sound reasoning, and as effectually subversive of all human knowledge, as if he attempted to disprove truths which he knew to be agreeable to the eternal and necessary relations of things. Whether the Deity can or cannot change these truths into falsehoods, we need not seek to determine, because it is of no consequence to us to know. It becomes us better to inquire, with humility and reverence, into what he has done, than vainly, and perhaps presumptuously, into what he can do. Whatever he has been pleased to establish in the universe, is as certainly established, as if it were in itself unchangeable and from eternity; and, while he wills it to remain what he made it, is as permanent as his own nature.

## CHAP. II.

*The preceding theory rejected by sceptical writers.*

WE have seen, that mathematicians and natural philosophers do, in effect, acknowledge the distinction between common sense and reason, as above explained; admitting the dictates of the former as ultimate and unquestionable principles, and never attempting either to prove or to disprove them by reasoning. If we enquire a little into the genius of modern scepticism, we shall see, that, there, a very different plan of investigation has been adopted. This will best appear by instances taken from that pretended philosophy. But first let us offer a few general remarks.



## SECT. I.

*General Observations. Rise and Progress of Modern Scepticism.*

1. THE Cartesian philosophy is to be considered as the ground-work of modern scepticism. The source of Locke's reasoning against the separate existence of the secondary qualities of matter, of Berkeley's reasoning against the existence of a material world, and of Hume's reasoning against the existence both of soul and body, may be found in the first part of the *Principia* of Des Cartes. Yet nothing seems to have been further from the intention of this worthy and most ingenious philosopher, than to give countenance to error, irreligion, or licentiousness. He begins with doubting; but it is with a view to arrive at conviction: his successors (some of them at least) the further they advance in their systems, become more and more sceptical; and at length the reader is told, to his infinite pleasure and emolument, that the understanding, acting alone, does entirely subvert itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition whatsoever\*.

The first thing a philosopher ought to do, according to Des Cartes, is to divest himself of all prejudices, and all his former opinions; to reject the evidence of sense, of intuition, and of mathematical demonstration; to suppose that there is no God, nor heaven, nor earth; and that man has neither hands, nor feet, nor body;—in a word, he is to doubt of every thing of which it is possible to doubt, and to be persuaded, that every thing is false which can possibly be conceived to be doubt-

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 464.

ful. Now there is only one point of which it is possible not to doubt, namely, That I, the person who doubts, am thinking. This proposition, therefore, *I think*, and this only, may be taken for granted; and nothing else whatsoever is to be believed without proof.

What is to be expected from this strange introduction? One or other of these two things must necessarily follow. This author will either believe nothing at all, or if he believe any thing, it must be upon the recommendation of false and sophistical reasoning.\* But Des Cartes is no sceptic in his moral reasonings, therefore, in his moral reasonings he must be a sophister. Let us see whether we can make good this charge against him by facts.

Taking it for granted, that he thinks, he thence infers, that he exists: *Ego cogito, ergo sum*: I think; therefore, I exist. Now there cannot be thought where there is no existence; before he take it for granted that he thinks, he must also take it for granted that he exists. This argument, therefore, proceeds on a supposition, that the thing to be proved is true; in other words, it is a sophism, a *petitio principii*. Even supposing it possible to conceive thinking without at the same time conceiving existence, still this is no conclusive argument, except it could be shown, that it is more evident to a man that he thinks, than that he exists; for in every true proof a less evident proposition is inferred from one that is more evident. But *I think* and *I exist*, are equally evident. Therefore this is no true proof.—To set an example of false reasoning in the very foundation of a system, can hardly fail to have bad consequences.

\* See the first part of this Essay.



Having in this manner established his own existence, our author next proceeds to prove the veracity of his faculties; that is, to show by reasoning that what he thinks true, is really true, and that what he thinks false is really false.- He would have done better to have taken this also for granted: the argument by which he attempts to prove it, does more honour to his heart than to his understanding. It is indeed a sophism of the same kind with the former, in which he takes that for granted which he means to prove. It runs thus: We are conscious, that we have in our minds the idea of a being infinitely perfect, intelligent and powerful, necessarily existent and eternal. This idea differs from all our other ideas in two respects:—It implies the notions of eternal and necessary existence, and infinite perfection;—it neither is, nor can be, a notion of the imagination; and therefore exhibits no chimera or imaginary being, but a true and immutable nature, which must of necessity exist, because necessary existence is comprehended in the idea of it. Therefore there is a God, necessarily existent, infinitely wise, powerful and true, and possessed of all perfection. This Being is the maker of us and of all our faculties; he cannot deceive, because he is infinitely perfect; therefore our faculties are true, and not fallacious\*.—The same argument has been adopted by others, particularly by Dr. Barrow. “Cartesius,” says that pious and learned author, “hath well observed, that, to make us absolutely certain of our having attained the truth, it is required to be known, whether our faculties of apprehending and judging the truth, be true;—which can only be known from the power, goodness and truth of our Creator†.

\* Cartesii Princip. Philos. part 1. sec. 14. 15. 18.

† Lect. Geomet. 7.

I object not to this argument for the divine existence, drawn from the idea of an all-perfect being, of which the human mind is conscious; though perhaps this is not the most unexceptionable method of evincing that great truth. I allow, that when a man believes a God, he cannot, without absurdity and impiety, deny or question the veracity of his own faculties; and that to acknowledge a distinction between truth and falsehood, implies a persuasion, that certain laws are established in the universe, on which the natures of all created things depend, which (to me at least) is incomprehensible, except on the supposition of a supreme, intelligent, directing cause. But I acquiesce in these principles, because I take the veracity of my faculties for granted; and this I feel myself necessitated to do, because I feel it to be the law of my nature which I cannot possibly counteract. Proceeding then upon this innate and irresistible notion, that my faculties are true, I infer by the justest reasoning, that God exists: and the evidence for this great truth is so clear and convincing, that I cannot withstand its force, if I believe any thing else whatsoever.

Des Cartes argues in a different manner. Because God exists, says he, and is perfect, therefore my faculties are true. Right.—But how do you know that God exists? I infer it from the second principle of my philosophy, already established, *Cogito ergo sum*.—How do you know that your inference is just? It satisfies my reason.—Your argument proceeds on a supposition, that what satisfies your reason is true? It does.—Do you not then take it for granted, that your reason is not a fallacious, but a true faculty? This must be taken for granted, otherwise the argument is good for nothing. And if so, your argument proceeds on a supposition, that the point to be proved



is true. In a word, you pretend to prove the truth of our faculties, by an argument which evidently and necessarily supposes their truth. Your philosophy is built on sophisms; how then can it be according to common sense?

As this philosopher doubted where he ought to have been confident, so he is often confident where he ought to doubt. He admits not his own existence, till he thinks he has proved it; yet his system is replete with hypotheses taken for granted, without proof, almost without examination. He sets out with the profession of universal scepticism; but many of his theories are founded in the most unphilosophical credulity. Had he taken a little more for granted, he would have proved a great deal more: he takes almost nothing for granted, (I speak of what he professes, not of what he performs); and therefore he proves nothing. In geometry, however, he is rational and ingenious; there are some curious remarks in his discourse on the passions; his physics are fanciful and plausible; his treatise on music perspicuous, though superficial: a lively imagination seems to have been his chief talent; want of knowledge in the grounds of evidence his principal defect.

We are informed by Father Malebranche, that the senses were at first as honest faculties as one could desire to be endued with, till after they were debauched by original sin; an adventure, from which they contracted such an invincible propensity to cheating, that they are now continually lying in wait to deceive us. But there is in man, it seems, a certain clear-sighted, stout, old faculty, called *reason*, which, without being deceived by appearances, keeps an eye upon the rogues, and often proves too cunning for them. Malebranche therefore adviseth us to doubt with all our might. "If a man has only learned to doubt," says he,

“let him not imagine that he has made an inconsiderable progress\*.” Progress! in what?—in science? Is it not a contradiction, or at least an inconsistency, in terms, to say that a man makes progress in science by doubting†? If one were to ask the way to Dublin, and to receive for answer, that he ought first of all to sit down; for that if he had only learned to sit still, he might be assured, that he had made no inconsiderable progress in his journey; I suppose he would hardly trouble his informer with a second question.

It is true, this author makes a distinction between the doubts of passion, brutality, and blindness, and those of prudence, distrust, and penetration: the former, says he, are the doubts of Academics and Atheists; the latter are the doubts of a true philosopher‡. It is true also, that he allows us to give an entire consent to the things that appear entirely evident||. But he adopts, notwithstanding, the principles of Des Cartes’ first philosophy, That we ought to begin our inquiries with universal doubt, taking only our own consciousness for granted, and thence inferring our existence, and the existence of God, and proving, from the divine veracity, that our faculties are not fallacious.— Whereever it is possible that a deluding spirit may deceive us, there, says Malebranche, we ought to

\* Qu’on ne s’imagine pas, que l’on ait peu avancé, si on a seulement appris à douter.

*La Recherche de la Verité, liv. 1. ch. 20.*

† Est contrarietas inter verba scivi, et dubia sunt.

*Des Cartes, Object. et Respons. septimæ.*

‡ Recherche de la Verité, liv. 1. ch. 20. sect. 3.

|| Qu’on ne doit jamais donner un consentement entier, qu’à des choses qui paroissent entierement evidentes. *Recherche de la Verité, liv. 1. ch. 20. sect. 3.*—This is indeed a rational scepticism, such as Aristotle recommends, and every friend to truth must approve.



doubt\* ; but a deluding spirit may deceive us wherever our memory is employed in reasoning; therefore, in all such reasonings, there may be error. And if so, there may be error in reasoning of every kind; for without memory there can be no reasoning: but in the truths discovered by a single glance, (*connoissances de simple vue*), such as this, That two and two make four, it is not possible, for a deluding god, (*dieu trompeur*), however powerful, to deceive him.—It is easy to see, that such doctrines must lead either to sophistry or to universal scepticism, or rather to both. For if a demonstrated conclusion may be false, for any thing I know to the contrary, an axiom may be so too: my belief of the first is not less necessary, than my belief of the last. Intuition is, of all evidence, the clearest, and most immediately convincing; but demonstration produces absolute certainty, and full conviction, in the mind of him who understands it†.—Malebranche, indeed, acknowledges, that we may reason when once we know that God is no deceiver: but this, he says, must be known at one glance, (that is, I suppose, intuitively), or it cannot be known at all; for all reasoning on this subject may be fallacious‡.

But I do not pretend to unfold all the false and sceptical principles of this author's philosophy. To confess the truth, I do not well understand it. He is generally mystical: often, if I mistake not, self-contradictory; and his genius is strangely warped by a superstitious veneration for the absurdities

\* Id. liv. 6. ch. 6.

† See the second chapter of the first book of the latter Analytics of Aristotle. The great philosopher holds, that intuition and demonstration are equally productive of knowledge; though the former be the first, the clearest, and most immediate evidence.

‡ Recherche de la Verité, liv. 6. ch. 6.

of Popery. He rejects the evidence of sense, because it seems repugnant to his reason; he admits transubstantiation, though certainly repugnant both to reason and sense. Of Aristotle, and Seneca, and the other ancient philosophers, he says that their lights are nothing but thick darkness, and their most illustrious virtues, nothing but intolerable pride\*. Fy, M. Malebranche! Popery with all its absurdities, requires not from its adherents so uncandid, and so illiberal a declaration. An Aristotelian, of your own religion and country, and nearly of your own age, delivers a very different doctrine; "Aristotle, supported by philosophy, hath ascended by the steps of motion even to the knowledge of one first mover, who is God. In order to arrive at the knowledge of divine things, we must learn science, otherwise we shall fall into error. Philosophy and theology bear testimony to, and mutually confirm each other, and produce a more perfect knowledge of the truth; the latter teaches what we ought to believe, and reason makes us believe it more easily, and with greater steadiness. They are two lights, which, by their union, yield a more brilliant lustre than either of them could yield singly, or both if separated. Moses learned the philosophy of the Egyptians, and Daniel in Babylon that of the Chaldeans†." This learned and judicious Peripatetic goes on to show, that Jerome, Augustine, Gregory of Nice, and Clemens Alexandrinus, entertained the same honourable opinion of the ancient Philosophers.—If Des Cartes, and his disciple Malebranchè, had studied the ancients more, and indulged their own imagination less, they would have made a better

\* Recherche de la Verité, liv. 6. ch. 6.

† Bouju. Introduction à la Philosophie, chap. 9. Paris 1614. folio.



figure in philosophy, and done much more service to mankind. But it was their aim to decry the ancients as much as possible: and ever since their time, it has been too much the fashion to overlook the discoveries of former ages, as altogether unnecessary to the improvement of the present. Malebranche often inveighs against Aristotle in particular, with the most virulent bitterness; and affects, on all occasions, to treat him with supreme contempt\*. Had this great ancient employed his genius in the subversion of virtue, or in establishing tenets incompatible with the principles of natural religion, he would have deserved the severest censure. But Malebranche lays nothing of this kind to his charge; he only finds him guilty of some speculative errors in natural philosophy.—Aristotle was not exempted from that fallibility which is incident to human nature; yet it would not be amiss, if our modern wits would study him a little before they venture to decide so positively on his abilities and character. It is observable, that he is most admired by those who best understand him. Now, the contrary is true of our modern sceptics: they are most admired by those who read them least, and who take their characters upon trust, as they find them delivered in coffee-houses, and drawing-rooms, and other places of fashionable conversation, whose doctrines do so much honour to the virtue and good sense of this enlightened age.

I have sometimes heard the principles of the Socratic school urged as a precedent to justify our modern sceptics. Modern scepticism is of two kinds, unlike in their nature, though the one be the foundation of the other. Des Cartes begins with universal doubt, that in the end he may arrive

\* See *Recherche de la Verité*, liv. 6. ch. 5.

at conviction; Hume begins with hypothesis, and ends with universal doubt. Now, does not Aristotle propose, that all investigation should begin with doubt? And does not Socrates affirm, that he knows nothing certainly except his own ignorance?

All this is true. Aristotle proposes, that investigation should begin with doubt\*. He compares doubting to a knot, which it is the end of investigation to disintangle; and there can be no solution, where there is no knot or difficulty to be solved. But Aristotle's doubt is quite of a different nature from that of Des Cartes. The former admits as true whatever is self-evident, without seeking to prove it; nay, he affirms, that those men who attempt to prove self-evident principles, or who think that such principles may be proved, are ignorant of the nature of proof†. It differs also most essentially from the scepticism of Mr. Hume. The reasonings of this author all terminate in doubt; whereas Aristotle's constant aim is, to discover truth, and establish conviction. He defines philosophy *the Science of Truth*; divides it into speculative and practical; and expressly declares that truth is the end of the former, and action of the latter‡.

Cicero, in order to compliment a sect, of which, however, he was not a consistent disciple, ascribes to Socrates a very high degree of scepticism ||;

\* Aristot. Metaphys. lib. 3. cap. 1. *Αυειν δ' εκ εστιν αγνουντα τον δεσμον,*

† Aristot. Metaphys. lib. 4. cap. 4.

‡ Ο'ρθως δ' εχει κ, το καλεσαι την φιλοσοφiam επισημην της αληθειας. θεωρητικης μεν γαρ τελος, αληθεια. πρακτικης, δ' εργον.

*Metaphys. lib. 2. cap. 1.*

|| Cic. Academ. lib. 1. cap. 12.



making his principles nearly the same with those of the New Academy, who professed to believe, that all things are so involved in darkness, that nothing can be known with certainty. The only difference between them, according to Cicero, in this place, is, that Socrates affirmed, that he knew nothing but his own ignorance: whereas Arcesilas and the rest of the New Academy, held, that man could know nothing, not even his own ignorance, with certainty; and therefore, that affirmation of every kind is absurd and unphilosophical. But we need not take this on the authority of Cicero; as we have access to the same original authors from whom he received his information. And if we consult them, particularly Xenophon, the most unexceptionable of them all in point of veracity, we shall find, that the reasonings, the sentiments, and the conduct of Socrates, are altogether incompatible with scepticism. The first science that engaged his attention was natural philosophy; which, as it was taught in those days by Zeno, Anaxagoras, and Xenophanes, had very little to recommend it to a man of sense and candour. Socrates soon relinquished it, from a persuasion that it was at once unprofitable, and founded in uncertainty; and employed the rest of his life in the cultivation of moral philosophy, a science which to him seemed more satisfactory in its evidence, and more useful in its application\*. So far was he from being sceptical in regard to the principles of moral duty, that he inculcated them with earnestness wherever he found opportunity, and thought it incumbent on every man to make himself acquainted with them. In his reasonings, indeed, he did not formally lay down any principle, because it was his method to deduce his conclusions

\* Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 1. cap. 1. et lib. 4. cap. 7.

from what was acknowledged by his antagonist: but is this any proof, that he himself did not believe his own conclusions? Read the story of his life; his conduct never belied his principles: observe the manners of our sceptics; their conduct and principles do mutually and invariably bely one another. Do you seek still more convincing evidence, that Socrates felt, believed, and avowed the truth? Read the defence he made before his judges. See you there any signs of doubt, hesitation, or fear? any suspicion of the possibility of his being in the wrong? any dissimulation, sophistry, or art? See you not, on the contrary, the utmost plainness and simplicity, the calmest and most deliberate fortitude, and that noble assurance which so well becomes the cause of truth and virtue? Few men have shewn so firm an attachment to truth, as to lay down their life for its sake: yet this did Socrates. He made no external profession of any philosophical creed; but in his death, and through the whole of his life, he shewed the steadiest adherence to principle; and his principles were all consistent. Xenophon has recorded many of these; and tells us, in regard to some of them, that Socrates scrupled not to call those men fools who differed from his opinion\*.—The sophists of his age were not solicitous to discover truth, but only to confute an adversary, and reason plausibly in behalf of their theories. That they might have the ampler field for this sort of speculation, they confined themselves, like our modern metaphysicians, to general topics, such as the nature of good, of beauty, and the like; on which one may say a great many things with little meaning, and offer a variety of arguments without one word of truth. Socrates did much to discredit this abuse of science. In his

\* Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 1. cap. 1. passim.



conversation he did not trouble himself with the niceties of artificial logic. His aim was, not to confute an adversary, nor to guard against that verbal confutation which the sophists were perpetually attempting, but to do good to those with whom he conversed, by laying their duty before them in a striking and persuasive manner\*. He was not fond of reasoning on abstract subjects, especially when he had to do with a sophist; well knowing, that this could answer no other purpose than to furnish matter for endless and unprofitable logomachy. When, therefore, Aristippus asked him concerning the nature of good†, with a view to confute, or at least tease him, with quibbling evasions, Socrates declined to answer in general terms; and desired the sophist to limit his question, by confining the word *good* to some particular thing. Do you ask me, says he, what is good for a fever, for sore eyes, or for hunger? No, says the sophist. If, replies he, you ask me concerning the nature of a good which is good for no particular purpose, I tell you once for all, that I know of none such, and have no desires after it. In like manner, he answers to the general question concerning beauty, by desiring his adversary to confine himself to some particular kind of beauty. What would the great moralist have thought of those modern metaphysical treatises, which seem to have nothing else in view, but to contrive vain and questionable definitions of general ideas! Simple, certain, and useful truth, was the constant, and the only object of this philosopher's inquiry.

\* Αριστιππος δε επιχειρουντος ελεγχειν τον Σωκρατην, — βελομενος της συνοντας ωφελειν ο Σωκρατης απεκρινατο, εχ ωσπερ οι φυλαττομενοι, μη πη ο λογος επαλλαχθη, αλλ' ως αν πεπεισμενοι μαλιστα πραττειν τα δεοντα.

Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 3. cap. 8.

† Id. Ibid.

True it is, he sometimes said, that he knew nothing but his own ignorance. And surely the highest attainments in human knowledge are imperfect and unsatisfying. Yet man knows something: Socrates was conscious that he knew something; otherwise Xenophon would not have asserted, that his opinions concerning God, and Providence, and Religion, and Moral Duty, were well known to all the Athenians\*. But Socrates was humble, and made no pretensions to any thing extraordinary, either in virtue or in knowledge. He professed no science; he instructed others, without pedantry, and without parade: exemplifying the beauty and the practicability of virtue, by the innocence and integrity of his life, and by the charms of an instructive, though most insinuating, conversation†. I shall allow our modern sceptics to avail themselves all they can of the authority of Des Cartes, and Malebranche, of Pyrrho and Anaxarchus; but let them not presume to sanctify their trash with the venerable names of Socrates and Aristotle.

Cicero seems to have been an Academic rather in name than in reality. And I am apt to think from several passages in his works‡, that he made choice of this denomination, in order to have a pretence for reasoning on either side of every question, and consequently an ampler field for a display of his rhetorical talents||. To Pyrrho, Herillus, Aristo, and other sceptics, who by asserting that all things are indifferent, destroy the distinction of virtue and vice, he will not allow even the name

\* Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 1. cap. 1.

† Ibid. cap. 2.

‡ See particularly *De Officiis*, lib. 3. cap. 4. *De Fato*, cap. 2.

|| See this point illustrated in REMARKS UPON A DISCOURSE OF FREETHINKING, &c. By *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis* (Dr. Bentley), Edit. 7th, page 272.



of philosopher: nay, he insinuates that it is impudence in such persons to pretend to it\*. “I wish,” says he in another place, “that they who suppose me a sceptic were sufficiently acquainted with my sentiments. For I am not one of those whose mind wanders in error, without any fixed principle. For what sort of understanding must that man possess, what sort of life must that man lead, who, by divesting himself of principle, divests himself of the means, both of reasoning and of living†!” Let it be observed also, that when the subject of his inquiry is of high importance, as in his books of moral duties, and on the nature of the gods, he follows the doctrine of the Dogmatists, particularly the Stoics; and asserts his moral and religious principles with a warmth and energy which prove him to have been in earnest.

2. Nothing was further from the intention of Locke, than to encourage verbal controversy, or advance doctrines favourable to scepticism. To do good to mankind, by inforcing virtue, illustrating truth, and vindicating liberty, was his sincere purpose; and he did not labour in vain. His writings are to be reckoned among the few books that have been productive of real utility to mankind. But candour obliges me to remark, that some of his tenets seem to be too rashly admitted, for the sake of a favourite hypothesis. That some of them have promoted scepticism, is undeniable. He seems indeed to have been sensible, that there were inaccuracies in his work; and candidly owns, that “some hasty and indigested thoughts on a

\* De Officiis, lib. 1. cap. 2.

† Quibus vellem satis cognita esset nostra sententia. Non enim sumus ii, quorum, vagetur animus errore, nec habeat unquam quid sequatur. Quæ enim esset ista mens, vel quæ vita potius, non modo disputandi, sed vivendi ratione sublata!

Cic. de Officiis, lib. 2. cap. 2.

subject never before considered, gave the first entrance to his Essay; which, being begun by chance, was continued by intreaty, written by incoherent parcels, and after long intervals of neglect resumed again, as humour or occasion permitted\*.”

The first book of his Essay, which, with submission, I think the worst, tends to establish this dangerous doctrine, That the human mind, previous to education and habit, is as susceptible of any one impression as of any other: a doctrine which, if true, would go near to prove, that truth and virtue are no better than human contrivances; or, at least, that they have nothing permanent in their nature, but may be as changeable as the inclinations and capacities of men; and that, as we understand the term, there is no such thing as common sense in the world. Surely this is not the doctrine that Locke meant to establish; but his zeal against innate ideas, and innate principles, put him off his guard, and made him allow too little to instinct, for fear of allowing too much. This controversy, so far as it regards moral sentiment, we have examined in another place. At present we would only observe, that if truth be any thing permanent, which it must be if it be any thing at all, those perceptions or impulses of understanding, by which we become conscious of it, must be equally permanent; which they could not be, if they depended on education, and if there were not a law of nature, independent on man, which determines the understanding in some cases to believe, in others to disbelieve. Is it possible to imagine, that any course of education could ever bring a rational creature to believe, that two and two are equal to three, and that he is not the same person to-day he was yesterday, that the ground he stands

\* Preface to the Essay on Human Understanding.



on does not exist? could make him disbelieve the testimony of his own senses, or that of other men? could make him expect unlike events in like circumstances? or that the course of nature, of which he has hitherto had experience, will be changed even when he foresees no cause to hinder its continuance? I can no more believe, that education could produce such a depravity of judgment, than that education could make me see all human bodies in an inverted position, or hear with my nostrils, or take pleasure in burning or cutting my flesh. Why should not our judgments concerning truth be acknowledged to result from a bias impressed upon the mind by its Creator, as well as our desire of self-preservation, our love of society, our resentment of injury, our joy in the possession of good? If those judgments be not instinctive, I should be glad to know how they come to be universal: the modes of sentiment and behaviour produced by education are uniform, only where education is uniform; but there are many truths which have obtained universal acknowledgment in all ages and nations. If those judgments be not instinctive, I should be glad to know how men find it so difficult, or rather impossible, to lay them aside: the false opinions we imbibe from habit and education, may be, and often are, relinquished by those who make a proper use of their reason; and the man who thus renounces former prejudices, upon conviction of their falsity, is applauded by all as a man of candour, sense, and spirit; but if one were to suffer himself to be argued out of his common sense, the whole world would pronounce him a fool.

The substance, or at least the foundation, of Berkeley's argument against the existence of matter, may be found in Locke's Essay, and in the *Principia* of Des Cartes. And if this argument

be conclusive, it proves that to be false which every man must necessarily believe every moment of his life to be true, and that to be true which no man since the foundation of the world was ever capable of believing for a single moment. Berkeley's doctrine attacks the most incontestible dictates of common sense; and pretends to demonstrate, that the clearest principles of human conviction, and those which have determined the judgment of all men in all ages, and by which the judgment of all rational men must be determined, are certainly fallacious.

Mr. Hume, more subtle, and less reserved, than any of his predecessors, hath gone still greater lengths in the demolition of common sense; and reared in its place a most tremendous fabric of doctrine; upon which, if it were not for the flimsiness of its materials, engines might easily be erected, sufficient to overturn all belief, science, religion, virtue, and society, from the very foundation. He calls this work, "A Treatise of Human Nature; being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects." This is, in the style of Edmund Curl, a *taking title page*; but, alas; "Fronti nulla fides!" The whole of this author's system is founded on a false hypothesis taken for granted; and whenever a fact contradictory to that false hypothesis occurs to his observation, he either denies it, or labours hard to explain it away. This, it seems, in his judgment, is experimental reasoning: in mine, it is just the reverse.

He begins his book with affirming, That all the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two classes, impressions and ideas; that the latter are all copied from the former; and that an idea differs from its correspondent impression only in being a weaker perception. Thus, when I sit



by the fire, I have an impression of heat, and I can form an idea of heat when I am shivering with cold; in the one case I have a stronger perception of heat, in the other a weaker. Is there any warmth in this idea of heat? There must, according to Mr. Hume's doctrine; only the warmth of the idea is not quite so strong as that of the impression. For this profound author repeats it again and again, that an idea is by its nature weaker and fainter than an impression, but is in every other respect (not only similar, but) the same\*. Nay, he goes further, and says, that whatever is true of the one must be acknowledged concerning the other†; and he is so confident of the truth of this maxim, that he makes it one of the pillars of his philosophy. To those who may be inclined to admit this maxim on his authority, I would propose a few plain questions. Do you feel any, even the least, warmth, in the idea of a bonfire, a burning mountain, or the general conflagration? Do you feel more real cold in Virgil's Scythian winter, than in Milton's description of the flames of hell? Do you acknowledge that to be true of the idea of eating, which is certainly true of the impression of it, that it alleviates hunger, fills the belly, and contributes to the support of human life? If you answer these questions in the negative, you deny one of the fundamental principles of Mr. Hume's philosophy. We have, it is true, a livelier perception of a friend, when we see him, than when we think of him in his absence. But this is not all: every person of a sound mind knows, that in the one case we believe, and are certain, that the object exists, and is present with us; in the other we believe, and are certain, that the object is not present: which, how-

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 131.

† Ibid. p. 41.

ever, Mr. Hume must deny; for he maintains, that an idea differs from an impression only in being weaker, and in no other respect whatsoever.

That every idea should be a copy and resemblance of the impression whence it is derived;—that, for example, the idea of red should be a red idea; the idea of a roaring lion a roaring idea; the idea of an ass, a hairy, long-eared, sluggish idea, patient of labour, and much addicted to thistles; that the idea of extension should be extended, and that of solidity solid;—that a thought of the mind should be endued with all, or any of the qualities of matter,—is, in my judgment, inconceivable and impossible. Yet Mr. Hume takes it for granted; and it is another of his fundamental maxims. Such is the credulity of scepticism!

If every idea be an exact resemblance of its correspondent impression, (or object; for these terms according to this author, amount to the same thing\*);—if the idea of whiteness be white, of solidity solid, and of extension extended, as the same author allows†;—then the idea of a line, the shortest that sense can perceive, must be equal in length to the line itself; for if shorter, it would be imperceptible; and it will not be said, either that an imperceptible idea can be perceived, or that the idea of an imperceptible object can be formed:—consequently the idea of a line a hundred times as long, must be a hundred times as long as the former idea; for if shorter, it would be the idea, not of this, but of some other shorter line. And so it clearly follows, nay it admits of mathematical demonstration, that the idea of an inch is really an inch long; and that of a mile, a mile long. In a word, every idea of any particular extension is

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. , 362.

† Ibid. p. 416, 417.



equal in length to the extended object. The same reasoning holds good in regard to the other dimensions of breadth and thickness. All ideas, therefore, of solid objects, must be (according to Mr. Hume's philosophy) equal in magnitude and solidity to the objects themselves. Now mark the consequence. I am just now in an apartment containing a thousand cubic feet, being ten feet square, and ten high; the door and windows are shut, as well as my eyes and ears. Mr. Hume will allow, that, in this situation, I may form ideas, not only of the visible appearance, but also of the real tangible magnitude of the whole house, of a first-rate man of war, of St. Paul's cathedral, or even of a much larger object. But the solid magnitude of these ideas is equal to the solid magnitude of the objects from which they are copied: therefore I have now present with me an idea, that is, a solid extended thing, whose dimensions extend to a million of cubic feet at least. The question now is, where is this thing placed? for a place it certainly must have, and a pretty large one too. I should answer, in my mind; for I know not where else the ideas of my mind can be so conveniently deposited. Now my mind is lodged in a body of no extraordinary dimensions, and my body is contained in a room ten feet square and ten feet high. It seems then, that, into this room, I have it in my power at pleasure to introduce a solid object a thousand, or ten thousand, times larger than the room itself. I contemplate it a while, and then, by another volition, send it a packing, to make way for another object of equal or superior magnitude. Nay, in no larger vehicle than a common post-chaise, I can transport from one end of the kingdom to the other, a building equal to the largest Egyptian pyramid, and a mountain as big as the peak of Teneriff.—Take care, ye disciples of

Hume, and be very well advised before ye reject this mystery as impossible and incomprehensible. It is geometrically deduced from the principles, nay, from the first principles of your master. By denying this, you give his system such a stab as it cannot survive.

Say, ye candid and intelligent, what are we to expect from a logical and systematic treatise founded on a supposition, that a part may be ten or a hundred thousand times greater than the whole? Shall we expect truth? Then it must be inferred by false reasoning.—Shall we expect sound reasoning? Then surely the inferences must be false.—Indeed, though I cannot much admire this author's sagacity on the present occasion, I must confess myself not a little astonished at his courage. A witch going to sea in an egg-shell, or preparing to take a trip through the air on a broom-stick, would be a surprising phenomenon; but it is nothing to Mr. Hume, on such a bottom, "launching out (as he somewhere expresses it) into the immense depths of philosophy."

To multiply examples for the confutation of so glaring an absurdity, is really ridiculous. I therefore, leave it to the reader to determine, whether, if this doctrine of solid and extended ideas be true, it will not follow, that the idea of a roaring lion must emit audible sound, almost, if not altogether, as loud and as terrible, as the royal beast in person could exhibit;—that two ideal bottles of brandy will intoxicate as far at least as two genuine bottles of wine;—and that I must be greatly hurt, if not dashed to pieces, if I am so imprudent, as to form only the idea of a bomb bursting under my feet. For has not our author said, that "impressions and ideas comprehend all the perceptions (or objects) of the human mind; that whatsoever is true of the one must be acknowledged concerning the other;



may, that they are in every respect the same, except that the former strike with more force than the latter."

The absurdity and inconceivableness of the distinction between objects and perceptions is another of our author's capital doctrines. "Philosophers," says he, "have distinguished between objects and perception, of the senses; but this distinction is not comprehended by *the generality of mankind*."\* Now how are we to know whether this distinction be conceived and acknowledged by *the generality*? If we put the question to any of them, we shall find it no easy matter to make ourselves understood, and, after all, perhaps be laughed at for our pains. Shall we reason *a priori* about their sentiments and comprehensions? this is often Mr. Hume's method; but it is neither philosophical nor fair. Will you allow me to reckon myself one of *the generality*? Then I declare, for my own part, that

\* See Treatise of Human Nature, vol. I. p. 353, 365. The word *perception* (and the same is true of the words *sensation*, *smell*, *taste*, and many others) has, in common language, two, and sometimes three, distinct significations. It means, 1. The thing perceived. Thus we speak of the *taste* of a fig, the *smell* of a rose. 2. The power or faculty perceiving; as when we say, "I have lost my *smell* by a severe cold, and therefore my *taste* is not so quick as usual." 3. It sometimes denotes that impulse or impression which is communicated to the mind by the external object operating upon it through the organ of sensation. Thus we speak of a *sweet* or *bitter taste*, a *distinct* or *confused*, a *clear* or *obscure*, *sensation* or *perception*. Most of our sceptical philosophers have either been ignorant of, or inattentive to this distinction: Malebranche, indeed, (liv. 1. ch. 10.) seems to have had some notion of it; but either I do not understand this author, or there is a strange obscurity and want of precision in almost every thing he says. Mr. Hume's philosophy does not allow this to be a rational distinction; so that it is impossible to know precisely what he means by the word *perception* in this and many other places. I have proved, however, that his assertion is false, whatever sense (consistent with common use) we affix to the word.

I do comprehend and acknowledge this distinction, and have done so ever since I was capable of reflection. I remember when a child, to have had my fingers scorched with burning coals, and stung by bees: but I never confounded the object with the perception; I never thought that the pain I felt could either make honey or melt lead.—The instance, you say, is somewhat equivocal.—Then, I hope the following is explicit enough.

Suppose me to address the common people in these words: “I see a strange sight a little way off; but my sight is weak, so that I see it imperfectly; let me go nearer, that I may have a more distinct sight of it.”——If the generality of mankind be at all incapable of distinguishing between the object and the perception, this incapacity will doubtless discover itself most, when ambiguous words are used on purpose to confound their ideas; but if their ideas on this subject are not confounded even by ambiguous language, there is reason to think, that they are extremely clear, distinct, and accurate. Now I have here proposed a sentence, in which there is a studied ambiguity of language; and yet I maintain, that every person of common sense, who understands English, will instantly, on hearing these words, perceive that by the word *sight* I mean, in the first clause, the thing seen; in the second the power, or perhaps the organ, of seeing; in the third, the perception itself, as distinguished both from the percipient faculty, and from the visible object\*. If one of the multitude,

\* To every person of common sense this distinction is in reality and practice quite familiar. But as the words we use in expressing it are of ambiguous signification, it is not easy to write about it so as to be immediately understood by every reader.—The the thing seen or perceived is something permanent and external, and is believed to exist, whether perceived or not; the faculty of seeing or perceiving is also something permanent in the mind, and is believed to exist whether ex-



on hearing me pronounce this sentence, were to reply as follows; "The sight is not at all strange; it is a man on horseback: but your sight must needs be weak, as you are lately recovered from sickness: however, if you wait a little till the man and horse, which are now in the shade, come into the sunshine, you will then have a much more distinct sight of them:"—I would ask, is the study of any part of philosophy necessary to make a man comprehend the meaning of these two sentences? Is there any thing absurd or unintelligible either in the former or in the latter? Is there any thing in the reply, that seems to exceed the capacity of the

erted or not; but what I here call *the perception itself* is temporary, and is conceived to have no existence but in the mind that perceives it, and to exist no longer than while it is perceived; for in being perceived, its very essence does consist; so that *to be*, and *to be perceived*, when predicated of it, do mean precisely the same thing. Thus, I just now see this paper, which I call the external object: I turn away, or shut my eyes, and then I see it no longer, but I still believe it to exist; though buried an hundred fathom deep in the earth, or left in an uninhabitable island, its existence would be as real, as if it were gazed at by ten thousand men. Again, when I shut my eyes or tie a bandage over them, or go into a dark place, I see no longer; that is, my faculty of seeing acts, or is acted upon, no longer; but I still believe it to remain in my mind, ready to act, or to be acted upon, whenever it is again placed in the proper circumstances; for nobody supposes, that by shutting our eyes, or going into a dark place, we annihilate our faculty of seeing. But thirdly, my *perception* of this paper is no permanent thing: nor has it any existence, but while it is perceived; nor does it at all exist but in the mind that perceives it; I can put an end to, or annihilate it, whenever I please, by shutting my eyes; and I can at pleasure renew it again by opening them.—It is really astonishing, that so many of our modern philosophers should have overlooked a distinction, which is of so great importance, that if we were unacquainted with it, a great part of human language would seem to be perfect nonsense. Such an oversight would be unpardonable in a dictionary-maker; but, I know not how it is, some of our philosophers have been admired and celebrated for their acumen in committing it.

vulgar, and supposes them to be more acute than they really are? If there be not, and I am certain there is not, here is an unquestionable proof, that the vulgar, and indeed all men whom metaphysic has not deprived of their senses, do distinguish between the object perceived, the faculty perceiving, and the perception or impulse communicated by the external object to the mind through the organ of sensation. What though all the three are sometimes expressed by the same name? This only shows, that accuracy of language is not always necessary for answering the common purposes of life. If the ideas of the vulgar are sufficiently distinct, notwithstanding, what shall we say of that philosopher, whose ideas are really confounded by this inaccuracy, and who, because there is no difference in the signs, imagines that there is none in the things signified! That the understanding of such a philosopher is not a vulgar one, will be readily allowed; whether it exceeds, or falls short, let the reader determine\*.

\* Mr. Hume is not always consistent with himself in affirming, that the vulgar do not comprehend the distinction between perceptions and objects. "It is not," he says, vol. 1. p. 337, "by arguments, that children, peasants, and the greatest part of mankind, are induced to attribute objects to some impressions, and deny them to others."—So! it seems the greatest part of mankind do acknowledge a distinction between objects and perceptions, "accordingly we find, that all the conclusions which the vulgar form on this head, are directly contrary to those which are confirmed by philosophy."—The more shame to that philosophy! say I.—"For philosophy informs us, that every thing which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind; whereas the vulgar confound perceptions and objects,"—that is, I suppose, do not distinguish the former from the latter.—How! in the last sentence it was said, that the greatest part of mankind do distinguish between impressions (which are a species of perceptions) and objects, "and attribute a distinct continued existence to the very things they feel or see."—So, now again the objects have a



This author's method of investigation is no less extraordinary than his fundamental principles. There are many notions in the human mind, of which it is not easy perhaps to explain the origin. If you can describe in words what were the circumstances in which you received an impression of any particular notion, it is well; Mr. Hume will allow that you may form an idea of it. But if you cannot do this, then says he, there is no such notion in your minds, for all perceptions are either impressions or ideas; and it is not possible for us so much as to conceive any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions\*: now all ideas are copied from impressions: therefore you can have no idea nor conception of any thing of which you have not received an impression.—All mankind have a notion of power or energy. No, says Mr. Hume; an impression of power or energy was never received by any man, and therefore an idea of it can never be formed in the human mind. If you insist on your experience and consciousness

distinct continued existence; that is, are something different from perceptions, which every body knows have no continued existence. Here Mr. Hume, within the compass of half a page, contradicts himself, and contradicts that contradiction, and finally acquiesces in the first contradiction. To hunt such a writer through so many shiftings and doublings, is not worth the reader's while nor mine. I hope we both know how to employ our time to better purpose. How often our author may affirm and deny, and deny and affirm, this doctrine, in the course of his work, I neither know nor care: it is certain, that, upon the whole, he holds the distinction between objects and perceptions to be *unreasonable* (p. 338.) *unphilosophical*, (ibid.), and *unsupported by the evidence of sense*, (p. 330.—337.)—And indeed, when this distinction, as we have explained it, is acknowledged, and attended to, all Berkeley's pretended demonstration of the non-existence of matter, and all Hume's reasonings against the existence both of matter and spirit, appear to be no better than a play upon words. For this key unlocks that whole mystery of sophism and quibble.

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 123.

of power, it is all a mistake: his hypothesis admits not the idea of power, and therefore there is no such idea\*.—All mankind have an idea of self. That I deny, says Mr. Hume; I maintain, that no man ever had, or can have, an impression of self; and therefore no man can form any idea of it†. If you persist, and say, that certainly you have some notion or idea of yourself: My dear Sir, he would say, you do not consider, that this assertion contradicts my hypothesis of impressions and ideas; how then is it possible it should be true! This, it seems, is experimental reasoning!

But though Mr. Hume deny, that I have any notion of self, surely he does not mean to affirm, that I do not exist, or that I have no notion of myself as an existent being. In truth, it is not easy to say what he means on this subject. Most philosophical subjects become obscure in the hands of this author; for he has a notable talent at puzzling his readers and himself: but when he treats of consciousness, of personal identity, and of the nature of the soul, he expresses himself so strangely, that his words either have no meaning, or imply a contradiction. “The question,” says he, “concerning the substance of the soul is unintelligible‡.” —Well, sir, if you think so, you may let it alone. —No; that must not be neither. “What we call a *mind*, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions (or objects) united together by certain relations, and supposed, though falsely, to be endowed with perfect simplicity and identity||.” —If any one, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason with him no longer. All that I can allow him is that he may be in the

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 282.

† Ibid. p. 437, 438.

‡ Ibid. p. 434, 435.

|| Ibid. p. 361, 362.



right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may perhaps perceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me. But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind,"—that is, who feel and believe, that they have a soul,—"I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.—There is properly no simplicity in the mind at one time, nor identity in different (times), whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity.—They are the successive perceptions only that constitute the mind."\*

If these words have any meaning, it is this: My soul (or rather that which I call my soul) is not one simple thing, nor is it the same thing to-day it was yesterday; nay, it is not the same this moment it was the last; it is nothing but a mass, collection, heap, or bundle, of different perceptions, or objects, that fleet away in succession, with inconceivable rapidity, perpetually changing, and perpetually in motion. There may be some metaphysicians to whose souls this description cannot be applied; but I (Mr. Hume) am certain, that this is a true and complete description of my soul, and of the soul of every other individual of the human race, those few metaphysicians excepted.

That body has no existence but as a bundle of perceptions, whose existence consists in their being perceived, our author all along maintains. He now affirms, that the soul, in like manner, is a bundle of perceptions, and nothing else. It follows,

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 438, 439, 440.

then, that there is nothing in the universe but impressions and ideas; all possible perceptions being by our author comprehended in those two classes. This philosophy admits of no other existence whatsoever, nor even of a percipient being to perceive these perceptions. So that we are now arrived at the height of human wisdom; at that intellectual eminence, from whence there is a full prospect of all that we can reasonably believe to exist, and of all that can possibly become the object of our knowledge. Alas! what is become of the magnificence of external nature, and the wonders of intellectual energy, the immortal beauties of truth and virtue, and the triumphs of a good conscience! Where now the warmth of benevolence, the fire of generosity, the exultations of hope, the tranquil ecstasy of devotion, and the pang of sympathetic delight! All, around, above, and beneath, is one vast vacuity, or rather an enormous chaos, encompassed with darkness universally and eternally impenetrable. Body and spirit are utterly annihilated; and there remains nothing (for we must again descend into the gibberish of metaphysic) but a vast collection, bundle, mass, or heap, of unperceived perceptions.

Such, if Mr. Hume's words have any meaning, is the result of his system. And what is this result? If he, or his admirers, can prove, that there is a possibility of expressing it in words which do not imply a contradiction, I will not call it nonsense. If he or they can prove, that it is compatible with any one acknowledged truth in philosophy, in morals, in religion natural or revealed, I will not call it impious. If he or they can prove, that it does not arise *from common facts misrepresented, and common words misunderstood*, I shall admit that it may have arisen from accurate ob-



servation, candid and liberal inquiry, perfect knowledge of human nature, and the enlarged views of true philosophic genius.

## SECT. II.

### *Of the Non-existence of Matter.*

IN the preceding section I have taken a slight survey of the principles, and method of investigation, adopted by the most celebrated promoters of modern scepticism. And it appears that they have not attended to the distinction of reason and common sense, as explained in the first part of this Essay, and as acknowledged by mathematicians and natural philosophers. Erroneous, absurd, and self-contradictory notions, have been the consequence. And now, by entering into a more particular detail, we might easily shew, that many of those absurdities that disgrace the philosophy of human nature, would never have existed, if men had acknowledged and attended to this distinction; regulating their enquiries by the criterion above-mentioned, and never prosecuting any chain of argument beyond the self-evident principles of common sense. We shall confine ourselves to two instances; one of which is connected with the evidence of external sense, and the other with that of internal.

That matter or body has a real, separate, independent existence;\* that there is a real sun above us, a real air around us, and a real earth under our

\* By *independent existence*, we mean an existence that does not depend on us, nor so far as we know, on any being, except the Creator. Berkeley, and others, say, that matter exists not but in the minds that perceive it; and consequently depends, in respect of its existence, upon those minds.

feet; has been the belief of all men who were not mad, ever since the creation. This is believed, not because it is or can be proved by argument, but because the constitution of our nature is such that we must believe it. There is here the same ground of belief, that there is in the following propositions: I exist; whatever is, is; two and two make four. It is absurd, nay, it is impossible, to believe the contrary. I could as easily believe, that I do not exist, that two and two are equal to ten, that whatever is, is not; as that I have neither hands, nor feet, nor head, nor clothes, nor house, nor country, nor acquaintance; that the sun, moon, and stars, ocean and tempest, thunder and lightning, mountains, rivers, and cities, have no existence but as ideas or thoughts in my mind, and, independent on me and my faculties, do not exist at all, and could not exist if I were to be annihilated; that fire, and burning, and pain, which I feel, and the recollection of pain that is past, and the idea of pain which I never felt, are all in the same sense ideas or perceptions in my mind, and nothing else; that the qualities of matter are not qualities of matter, but affections of spirit; and that I have no evidence that any being exists in nature but myself. Philosophers may say what they please; and the world, who are apt enough to admire what is monstrous, may give them credit; but I affirm, that it is not in the power, either of wit or of madness, to contrive any conceit more inconsistent, more absurd, or more nonsensical, than this, that the material world has no existence but in my mind.

Des Cartes admits, that every person must be persuaded of the existence of a material world: but he does not allow this point to be self-evident, or so certain as not to admit of doubt; because, says he, we find in experience, that our senses are



sometimes in an error, and because, in dreams we often mistake ideas for external things really existing. He therefore begins his philosophy of bodies with a formal proof of the existence of body\*.

But however imperfect, and however fallacious, we acknowledge our senses to be in other matters, it is certain, that no man ever thought them fallacious in regard to the existence of body: nay, every man of a sound mind, is, by the law of his nature, convinced, that, in this respect at least, they are not, and cannot be mistaken. Men have sometimes been deceived by sophistical argument, because the human understanding is in some, and indeed in many respects fallible; but does it follow, that we cannot, without proof, be certain of any thing, not even of our own existence, nor of the truth of a geometrical axiom? Some diseases are so fatal to the mind, as to confound men's notions even of their own identity; but does it follow, that I cannot be certain of my being the same person to-day I was yesterday, and twenty years ago, till I have first proved this point by argument? And because we are sometimes deceived by our senses, does it therefore follow, that we never are certain of our not being deceived by them, till we have first convinced ourselves by reasoning, that they are not deceitful?—If a Cartesian can prove, that there have been a few persons of sound understanding, who from a conviction of the deceitfulness of their senses, have really disbelieved, or seriously doubted, the existence of a material world, I shall allow a conviction of this deceitfulness to be a sufficient ground for such doubt or disbelief, in one or a few instances; and if he can prove that such doubt or disbelief has at any time been general among mankind, I shall allow that it

\* Cartesii Principia, part 1. sect. 4. part 2. sect. 1.

may possibly be so again;—but if it be certain, as I think it is, that no man of a sound mind, however suspicious of the veracity of his senses, ever did or could really disbelieve, or seriously doubt, the existence of a material world, then is this point self-evident, and a principle of common sense, even on the supposition that our senses are as deceitful as Des Cartes and Malebranche choose to represent them. But we have formerly proved, that our senses are never supposed to be deceitful, except when we are conscious, that our experience is partial, or our observation inaccurate; and that even then, the fallacy is detected, and rectified, only by the evidence of sense placed in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation. In regard to the existence of matter, there cannot possibly be a suspicion, that our observation is inaccurate, or our experience partial; and therefore it is not possible, that ever we should distrust our senses in this particular. If it were possible, our distrust could never be removed either by reasoning or by experience.

As to the suspicion against the existence of matter that is supposed to arise from our experience of the delusions of dreaming; we observe, in the first place, that if this be allowed a sufficient ground for suspecting, that our waking perceptions are equally delusive, there is at once an end of all truth, reasoning and common sense. That I am at present awake, and not asleep, I certainly know; but I cannot prove it: for there is no criterion for distinguishing dreaming fancies from waking perceptions, more evident, than that I am now awake, which is the point in question; and, as we have often remarked, it is essential to every proof, to be more evident than that which is to be proved. That I am now awake, must therefore carry its own evidence along with it; if it be evident at all,



it must be self-evident. And so it is: we may mistake dreams for realities, but no rational being ever mistook a reality for a dream. Had we the command of our understanding and memory in sleep, we should probably be sensible, that the appearances of our dreams are all delusive: which, in fact is sometimes the case: at least I have sometimes been conscious, that my dream was a dream; and when it was disagreeable, have actually made efforts to awake myself, which have succeeded. But sleep has a wonderful power over all our faculties. Sometimes we seem to have lost our moral faculty; as when we dream of doing that, without scruple or remorse, which when awake we could not bear to think of. Sometimes memory is extinguished; as when we dream of conversing with our departed friends without remembering any thing of their death, though it was, perhaps, one of the most striking incidents we had ever experienced, and is seldom or never out of our thoughts when we are awake. Sometimes our understanding seems to have quite forsaken us; as when we dream of talking with a dead friend, remembering at the same time that he is dead, but without being conscious of any thing absurd or unusual in the circumstance of conversing with a dead man. Considering these and the other effects of sleep upon the mind, we need not be surprised, that it should cause us to mistake our own ideas for real things, and be affected with those in the same manner as with these. But the moment we awake, and recover the use of our faculties, we are sensible that the dream was a delusion, and that the objects which now solicit our notice are real. To demand a reason for the implicit confidence we repose in our waking perceptions; or to desire us to prove, that things are as they appear to our waking senses, and not as they appear to us in sleep, is as unrea-

sonable as to demand a reason for our belief in our own existence: in both cases our belief is necessary and unavoidable, the result of a law of nature, and what we cannot in practice contradict, but to our shame and perdition.

If the delusions of dreaming furnish any reasonable pretence for doubting the authenticity of our waking perceptions, they may, with equal reason, make me doubtful of my own identity: for I have often dreamed that I was a person different from what I am; nay, that I was two or more distinct persons at one and the same time.

Further: If Des Cartes thought an argument necessary to convince him, that his perception of the external world was not imaginary, but real, I would ask, how he could know that his argument was real, and not imaginary. How could he know that he was awake, and not asleep, when he wrote his principles of philosophy, if his waking thoughts did not, previous to all reasoning, carry along with them undeniable evidence of their reality? *I am awake*, is a principle which he must have taken for granted, even before he could satisfy himself of the truth of what he thought the first of all principles, *Cogito, ergo sum*.—To all which we may add, that if there be any persons in the world who never dream at all\*, (and some such I think there are), and whose belief in the existence of a material world is not a whit stronger than that of

\* “I once knew a man,” says Mr. Locke, “who was bred a scholar, and had no bad memory, who told me, that he had never dreamed in his life, till he had that fever he was then newly recovered of, which was about the five or six and twentieth year of his age. I suppose the world affords more such instances.”

*Essay on Human Understanding, book 2. ch. 1.*

A young gentleman of my acquaintance never dreams at all, except when his health is disordered.



those whose sleep is always attended with dreaming; this is a proof from experience, that the delusions of sleep do not in the least affect our conviction of the authenticity of the perceptions we receive, and of the faculties we exert, when awake.

The first part of Des Cartes' argument for the existence of bodies, would prove the reality of the visionary ideas we perceive in dreams; for they, as well as bodies, present themselves to us, independent on our will. But the principal part of his argument is founded in the veracity of God, which he had before inferred from our consciousness of the idea of an infinitely perfect, independent, and necessarily-existent being. Our senses inform us of the existence of body; they give us this information in consequence of a law established by the divine will: but God is no deceiver; therefore is their information true. I have formerly given my opinion of this argument, and shewn that it is a sophism, as the author states it. We must believe our faculties to be true, before we can be convinced, either by proof, or by intuitive evidence. If we refuse to believe in our own faculties, till their veracity be first ascertained by reasoning, we shall never believe in them at all\*.

Malebranche† says, that men are more certain of the existence of God, than of the existence of body. He allows, that Des Cartes has proved the existence of body by the strongest arguments that reason alone could furnish; nay, he seems to acknowledge those arguments to be unexceptionable‡;

\* See the preceding section.

† Recherche de la verité, tom. 3. p. 30. A Paris, chez Pralard, 1679.

‡ Mais quoique M. Des Cartes ait donné les preuves le plus fortes que la raison toute seule puisse fournir pour l'existence des corps; quoiqu' il soit evident, que Dieu n'est point trompeur, et qu'on puisse dire qu'il nous tromperoit effectivement,

yet he does not admit that they amount to a full demonstration of the existence of matter. In philosophy, says he, we ought to maintain our liberty as long as we can, and to believe nothing but what evidence compels us to believe. To be fully convinced of the existence of bodies, it is necessary that we have it demonstrated to us, not only that there is a God, and that he is no deceiver, but also that God hath assured us, that he has actually created such bodies; and this, says he, I do not find proved in the works of M. Des Cartes.

There are, according to Malebranche, but two ways in which God speaks to the mind, and compels (or obliges) it to believe; to wit, by evidence, and by the faith. "The faith obliges us to believe that bodies exist; but as to the evidence of this truth, it certainly is not complete: and it is also certain, that we are not invincibly determined to believe, that any thing exists, but God, and our own mind. It is true, that we have an extreme propensity to believe, that we are surrounded with corporeal beings; so far I agree with M. Des Cartes: but this propensity, natural as it is, doth not force our belief by evidence; it only inclines us to believe by impression. Now we ought not to be determined, in our free judgments, by any thing but light and evidence; if we suffer our-

si nous nous trompions nous-mêmes faisant l'usage que nous devons faire de nôtre esprit, et des autres facultez dont il est l'auteur; cependant on peut dire que l'existence de la matiere n'est point encore parfaitement démontrée. Car, enfin, en matiere de philosophie, nous ne devons croire quoique ce soit, *que lorsque l'evidence nous y oblige*. Nous devons faire usage de nôtre liberté autant que nous le pouvons.—Pour être pleinement convaincus qu'il a des corps, il faut qu'on nous demonstre, non seulement qu'il y a un Dieu, et que Dieu n'est point trompeur, mais encore que Dieu, nous a assuré qu'il en a effectivement crée: ce que je ne trouve point prouvé dans les ouvrages de M. Des Cartes.—Tom. 3. p. 37, 38, 39.



selves to be guided by the sensible impression, we shall be almost always mistaken\*.” Our author, then proposes, in brief, the substance of that argument against the existence of body which Berkeley afterwards took such pains to illustrate; and and discovers, upon the whole, that, as a point of philosophy the existence of matter is but a probability, to which we have it in our power either to assent, or not to assent, as we please. In a word, it is by the faith, and not by evidence, that we become certain of this truth.

This is not a proper place for analysing the passage above quoted, otherwise it would be easy to show, that the doctrine (such as it is) which the author here delivers, is not reconcileable with other parts of his system. But I only mean to observe, that what is here asserted of our belief in the existence of body being not necessary, but such as we may with-hold if we please, is contrary to my experience. That my body, and this pen and paper, and the other corporeal objects around me, do really exist, is to me as evident, as that my soul exists; it is indeed so evident, that no-

\* Dieu ne parle à l'esprit, et ne l'oblige à croire qu'en deux manieres: par l'evidence, et par la foi. Je demeure d'accord, que *la foi oblige à croire* qu'il y a des corps; mais pour l'evidence, il est certain, qu'elle n'est point entiere, et que nous ne sommes point invinciblement portez à croire qu'il y ait quelque autre chose que Dieu et notre esprit. Il est vray, que nous avons un penchant extrême à croire qu'il y a des corps qui nous environnent. Je l'accorde à M. Des Cartes: mais ce penchant, tout naturel qu'il est, *ne nous y force point* par evidence; il nous y incline seulement par impression. Or nous ne devons suivre dans nos jugemens libres que la lumiere et l'evidence; et si nous nous laissons conduire à l'impression sensible, nous nous tromperons presque toujours. *Tom. 3. p. 39.—La foi I translate The faith*, because I suppose the author to mean the *Christian or Catholic faith*. If we take it to denote *faith or belief in general*, I know not how we shall make any sense of the passage.

thing is or can be more so; and though my life depended upon the consequence, I could not, by any effort, bring myself to entertain a doubt of it, even for a single moment.

I must therefore affirm, that the existence of matter can no more be disproved by argument, than the existence of myself, or than the truth of a self-evident axiom in geometry. To argue against it, is to set reason in opposition to common sense; which is indirectly to subvert the foundation of all just reasoning, and to call in question the distinction between truth and falsehood. We are told, however, that a great philosopher has actually demonstrated, *that matter does not exist*. Demonstrated! truly this is a piece of strange information. At this rate, any falsehood may be proved to be true, and any truth to be false. For it is impossible, that any truth should be more evident to me than this, *that matter does exist*. Let us see, however, what Berkeley has to say in behalf of this extraordinary doctrine. It is natural for demonstration, and for all sound reasoning, to produce conviction, or at least some degree of assent, in the person who attends to it, and understands it. I read *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, together with *The Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. The arguments I confess, are subtle, and well adapted to the purpose of puzzling and confounding. Perhaps I will not undertake to confute them. Perhaps I am busy, or indolent, or unacquainted with the principles of this philosophy, or little versed in your metaphysical logic. But am I convinced, from this pretended demonstration, that matter has no existence but as an idea in the mind? Not in the least; my belief now is precisely the same as before.—Is it unphilosophical, not to be convinced by arguments which I am not able to confute?



Perhaps it may, but I cannot help it: you may, if you please, strike me off the list of philosophers, as a non-conformist; you may call me unpliant, unreasonable, unfashionable, and a man with whom it is not worth while to argue: but till the frame of my nature be unhinged, and a new set of faculties given me, I cannot believe this strange doctrine, because it is perfectly incredible. But if I were permitted to propose one clownish question, I would fain ask, Where is the harm of my continuing in my old opinion, and believing, with the rest of the world, that I am not the only created being in the universe, but that there are many others, whose existence is as independent on me, as mine is on them? Where is the harm of my believing, that if I were to fall down yonder precipice, and break my neck, I should be no more a man of this world? My neck, Sir, may be an idea to you, but to me it is a reality, and an important one too. Where is the harm of my believing, that if in this severe weather, I were to neglect to throw (what you call) the idea of a coat over the ideas of my shoulders, the idea of cold would produce the idea of such pain and disorder as might possibly terminate in my real death? What great offence shall I commit against God or man, church or state, philosophy or common sense, if I continue to believe, that material food will nourish me, though the idea of it will not; that the real sun will warm and enlighten me, though the liveliest idea of him will do neither; and that, if I would obtain true peace of mind and self-approbation, I must not only form ideas of compassion, justice, and generosity, but also really exert those virtues in external performance? What harm is there in all this?—O! no harm at all, Sir;—but—the truth,—the truth,—will you shut your eyes against the truth?—No honest man ever will: convince me that your doctrine is true, and I will instantly embrace it.—Have I not convinced

thee, thou obstinate, unaccountable, inexorable?—Answer my arguments, if thou canst.—Alas, Sir, you have given me arguments in abundance, but you have not given me conviction! and if your arguments produce no conviction, they are worth nothing to me. They are like counterfeit bank-bills; some of which are so dexterously forged, that neither your eye nor mine can detect them: yet a thousand of them would go for nothing at the bank; and even the paper-maker would allow me more handsomely for old rags. You need not give yourself the trouble to tell me, that I ought to be convinced: I ought to be convinced only when I feel conviction; when I feel no conviction, I ought not to be convinced.—It has been observed of some doctrines and reasonings, that their extreme absurdity prevents their admitting a rational confutation. What? am I to believe such doctrine? am I to be convinced by such reasoning? Now, I never heard of any doctrine more scandalously absurd, than this of the non-existence of matter. There is not a fiction in the *Persian tales* that I could not as easily believe; the silliest conceit of the most contemptible superstition that ever disgraced human nature, is not more shocking to common sense, is not more repugnant to every principle of human belief. And must I admit this jargon for truth, because I cannot confute the arguments of a man who is a more subtle disputant than I? Does philosophy require this of me? Then it must suppose, that truth is as variable as the fancies, the characters, and the intellectual abilities of men, and that there is no such thing in nature as common sense.

But all this, I shall perhaps be told, is but childish cavil, and unphilosophical declamation. What if, after all, this very doctrine be believed, and the sophistry (as you call it) of Berkeley be admitted as sound reasoning, and legitimate proof? What



then becomes of your common sense, and your instinctive convictions?—What then, do you ask? Then indeed I acknowledge the fact to be very extraordinary; and I cannot help being in some pain about the consequences, which must be important and fatal. If a man, out of vanity, or from a desire of being in the fashion, or in order to pass for wonderfully wise, shall say, that Berkeley's doctrine is true, while at the same time his belief is precisely the same with mine it is well; I leave him to enjoy the fruits of his hypocrisy, which will no doubt contribute mightily to his improvement in candour, happiness, and wisdom. If a man professing this doctrine act like other men in the common affairs of life, I will not believe his profession to be sincere. For this doctrine, by removing body out of the universe, makes a total change in the circumstances of men; and therefore if it is not merely verbal, must produce a total change in their conduct. When a man is only turned out of his house, or stripped of his clothes, or robbed of his money, he must change his behaviour, and act differently from other men, who enjoy these advantages. Persuade a man that he is a beggar and a vagabond, and you shall instantly see him change his manners. If your arguments against the existence of matter have ever carried conviction along with them, they must at the same time have produced a much more extraordinary change of conduct; but if they have produced no change of conduct, I insist on it, they have never carried conviction along with them, whatever vehemence of protestation men may have used in avowing such conviction. If you say, that though a man's understanding be convinced, there are certain instincts in his nature that will not permit him to alter his conduct; or, if he did, the rest of the world would account him a mad-man; by the first apo-

logy, you allow the belief of the non-existence of body to be inconsistent with the laws of nature; by the second, to be inconsistent with common sense.

But if a man be convinced, that matter has no existence, and believe this strange tenet as steadily, and with as little distrust, as I believe the contrary; he will, I am afraid, have but little reason to applaud himself on this new acquisition in science; he will soon find, it had been better for him to have reasoned, and believed, and acted, like the rest of the world. If he fall down a precipice, or be trampled under foot by horses, it will avail him little, that he once had the honour to be a disciple of Berkeley, and to believe that those dangerous objects are nothing but ideas in the mind. And yet, if such a man be seen to avoid a precipice, or to get out of the way of a coach and six horses at full speed, he acts as inconsistently with his belief, as if he ran away from the picture of an angry man, even while he believed it to be a picture. Supposing his life preserved by the care of friends, or by the strength of natural instinct urging him to act contrary to his belief; yet will this belief cost him dear. For if the plainest evidence, and fullest conviction, be certainly fallacious, I beg to be informed, what kind of evidence, and what degree of conviction, may reasonably be depended on. If nature be a juggler by trade, is it for us, poor purblind reptiles, to attempt to penetrate the mysteries of her art, and take upon us to decide, when it is she presents a true, and when a false appearance! I will not say, however, that this man runs a greater risk of universal scepticism, than of universal credulity. Either the one or the other, or both, must be his portion; and either the one or the other would be sufficient to embitter my whole life, and to disqualify me for



every duty of a rational creature. He who can believe against common sense, and against the clearest evidence, and against the fullest conviction, in any one case, may do the same in any other; consequently he may become the dupe of every wrangler who is more acute than he; and then, if he is not entirely secluded from mankind, his liberty, and happiness, are gone for ever. Indeed a cheerful temper, strong habits of virtue, and the company of the wise and good, may still save him from perdition, if he have no temptations nor difficulties to encounter. But it is the end of every useful art, to teach us to surmount difficulties, not to disqualify us for attempting them. Men have been known to live many years in a warm chamber, after they were become too delicate to bear the open air; but who will say, that such a habit of body is desirable? what physician will recommend to the healthy such a regimen as would produce it?

But, that I may no longer suppose, what I maintain to be impossible, that mankind in general, or even one rational being, could, by force of argument, be convinced, that this absurd doctrine is true;—what if all men were in one instant deprived of their understanding by Almighty power, and made to believe, that matter has no existence but as an idea in the mind, all other earthly things remaining as they are?—Doubtless this catastrophe would, according to our metaphysicians, throw a wonderful light on all the parts of knowledge. I pretend not even to guess at the number, extent, or quality, of astonishing discoveries that would then start forth into view. But of this I am certain, that in less than a month after, there could not, without another miracle, be one human creature alive on the face of the earth.

Berkeley foresaw, and has done what he could to obviate, *some* of these objections. There are

two points which he has taken great pains to prove. The first is, That his system differs not from the belief of the rest of mankind; the second, That our conduct cannot be in the least affected by our disbelief of the existence of a material world.

1. As to the first, it is certainly false. Mr. Hume himself seems willing to give it up. I have known many who could not answer Berkeley's arguments; I never knew one who believed his doctrine. I have mentioned it to some who were unacquainted with philosophy, and therefore could not be supposed to have any bias in favour of either system; they all treated it as most contemptible jargon, and what no man in his senses ever did or could believe. I have carefully attended to the effects produced by it upon my own mind; and it appears to me at this moment, as when I first heard it, incredible and incomprehensible. I say incomprehensible: for though, by reading it over and over, I have got a set of phrases and arguments by heart, which would enable me, if I were so disposed, to talk, and argue, and write, "about it and about it;" yet, when I lay systems and syllogisms aside, when I enter on any part of the business of life, or when I refer the matter to the unbiassed decision of my own mind, I plainly see, that I had no distinct meaning to my words when I said, that the material world has no existence but in the mind that perceives it. In a word, if this author had asserted, that I and all mankind acknowledge and believe the *Arabian Night's Entertainment* to be a true history, I could not have had any better reason contradicting this, "That Berkeley's principles in regard to the existence of matter, differ not from the belief of the rest of mankind."

2. In behalf of the second point he argues, "That nothing gives us an interest in the material



world, except the feelings pleasant or painful which accompany our perceptions; that these perceptions are the same, whether we believe the material world to exist or not to exist; consequently, that our pleasant or painful feelings are also the same; and therefore, that our conduct, which depends on our feelings and perceptions, must be the same, whether we believe or disbelieve the existence of matter."

But if it be certain, that by the law of our nature we are unavoidably determined to believe that matter exists, and to act upon this belief, (and nothing, I think is more certain), how can it be imagined, that a contrary belief would produce no alteration in our conduct and sentiments? Surely the laws of our nature are not such trifles, as that it would be a matter of perfect indifference, whether we act and think agreeably to them or not? I believe that matter exists;—I must believe that matter exists;—I must continually act upon this belief; such is the law of my constitution. Suppose my constitution changed in this respect, all other things remaining as they are; would there then be no change in my sentiments and conduct? If there would not, then is this law of nature, in the first place, useless, because men could do as well without it; secondly, inconvenient, because its end is to keep us ignorant of the truth; and, thirdly, absurd, because insufficient for answering its end, the Bishop of Cloyne, and others, having, it seems, discovered the truth in spite of it. Is this according to the usual economy of Nature? Does this language become her servants and interpreters? Is it possible to devise any sentiments or maxims more subversive of truth, and more repugnant to the spirit of true philosophy?

Further: All external objects have some qualities in common; but between an external object and an

idea, or thought of the mind, there is not, there cannot possibly be, any resemblance. A grain of sand, and the globe of the earth ; a burning coal, and a lump of ice ; a drop of ink, and a sheet of white paper, resemble each other, in being extended, solid, figured, coloured, and divisible ; but a thought or idea has no extension, solidity, figure, colour, nor divisibility : so that no two external objects can be so unlike, as an external object and (what philosophers call) the idea of it. Now we are taught by Berkeley, that external objects, (that is, the things we take for external objects) are nothing but ideas in our minds ; in other words, that they are in every respect different from what they appear to be. This candle, it seems, hath not one of those qualities it appears to have : it is not white, nor luminous, nor round, nor divisible, nor extended ; for to an idea of the mind, not one of these qualities can possibly belong. How then shall I know what it really is ? From what it seems to be, I can conclude nothing ; no more than a blind man, by handling a bit of black wax, can judge of the colour of snow, or the visible appearance of the starry heavens. The candle may be an Egyptian pyramid, the king of Prussia, a mad dog, or nothing at all : it may be the island of Madagascar, Saturn's ring, or one of the Pleiades, for any thing I know, or can ever know to the contrary, except you allow me to judge of its nature from its appearance ; which, however, I cannot reasonably do, if its appearance and nature are in every respect so different and unlike as not to have one single quality in common. I must therefore believe it to be, what it appears to be, a real, corporeal, external object, and so reject Berkeley's system ; or I never can, with any shadow of reason, believe any thing whatsoever concerning it. Will it yet be said, that the belief of this system cannot in the least affect our sentiments and con-



duct? With equal truth may it be said, that Newton's conduct and sentiments would not have been in the least affected by his being metamorphosed into an idiot, or a pillar of salt.

Some readers may perhaps be dissatisfied with this reasoning, on account of the ambiguity of the words *external object* and *idea*; which, however, the assertors of the non-existence of matter have not as yet fully explained. Others may think that I must have misunderstood the author; for that he was too acute a logician to leave his system exposed to objections so decisive, and so obvious. To gratify such readers, I will not insist on these objections. That I may have misunderstood the author's doctrine, is not only possible, but highly probable; nay, I have reason to think, that it was not perfectly understood even by himself. For did not Berkeley write his *Principles of Human Knowledge*, with this express view, (which does him great honour), to banish scepticism both from science and from religion? Was he not sanguine in his expectations of success? And has not the event proved, that he was egregiously mistaken? For is it not evident, from the use to which later authors have applied it, that his system leads directly to atheism and universal scepticism? And if a machine disappoint its inventor so far as to produce effects contrary to those he wished, intended, and expected; may we not, without breach of charity, conclude, that he did not perfectly understand his plan? At any rate, it appears from this fact, that our author did not foresee all the objections to which his theory is liable. He did not foresee that it might be made the foundation of a sceptical system; if he had, we know he would have renounced it with abhorrence.

This one objection therefore, (in which I think I cannot be mistaken), will fully answer my present

purpose : Our author's doctrine is contrary to common belief, and leads to universal scepticism. Suppose it, then, universally and seriously adopted ; suppose all men divested of all belief, and consequently of all principle : would not the dissolution of society, and the destruction of mankind necessarily ensue ?

Still I shall be told, that Berkeley was a good man, and that his principles did him no hurt. I allow it ; he was indeed a most excellent person : none can revere his memory more than I. But does it appear, that he ever acted according to his principles, or that he thoroughly understood them ? Does it appear, that, if he had put them in practice, no hurt would have ensued to himself \*, or to society ? Does it appear, that he was a sceptic, or a friend to scepticism ? Does it appear, that men may adopt his principles without danger of becoming sceptics ? The contrary of all this appears with incontrovertible evidence.

Surely pride was not made for man. The most exalted genius may find in himself many affecting memorials of human frailty, and such as often render him an object of compassion to those who in vir-

\* Let it not be pretended, that a man may disbelieve his senses without danger of inconvenience. Pyrrho (as we read in Diogenes Laertius) professed to disbelieve his senses, and to be in no apprehension from any of the objects that affected them. The appearance of a precipice or wild beast was nothing to Pyrrho ; at least he said so : he would not avoid them ; he knew they were nothing at all, or at least that they were not what they seemed to be. Suppose him to have been in earnest ; and suppose his keepers to have in earnest adopted the same principles : would not their limbs and lives have been in as great danger, as the limbs and life of a blind and deaf man wandering by himself in a solitary place, with his hands tied behind his back ? I would as soon say, that our senses are useless faculties, as that we might disbelieve them without danger of inconvenience.



tue and understanding are far inferior. I pity Berkeley's weakness in patronising an absurd and dangerous theory ; I doubt not but it may have overcast many of his days with a gloom, which neither the approbation of his conscience, nor the natural serenity of his temper, could entirely dissipate. And though I were to believe, that he was intoxicated with this theory, and rejoiced in it ; yet still I should pity the intoxication as a weakness: for candour will not permit me to give it a harsher name; as I see in his other writings, and know by the testimony of his contemporaries, particularly Pope and Swift, that he was a friend to virtue, and to human nature.

We must not suppose a false doctrine harmless, merely because it has not been able to corrupt the heart of a good man. Nor, because a few sceptics have not authority to render science contemptible, nor power to overturn society, must we suppose, that therefore scepticism is not dangerous to science or mankind. The effects of a general scepticism would be dreadful and fatal. We must therefore, notwithstanding our reverence for the character of Berkeley, be permitted to affirm, what we have sufficiently proved, that his doctrine is subversive of man's most important interests, as a moral, intelligent, and percipient being.

After all, though I were to grant, that the disbelief of the existence of matter could not produce any considerable change in our principles of action and reasoning, the reader will find in the sequel\*, that the point I have chiefly in view would not be much affected even by that concession. I say not this, as being diffident or sceptical in regard to what I have advanced on the present subject. Doctrines which I do not believe, I will never recommend to

\* Part 2, chap. 3.

others. I am absolutely certain, that to me the belief of Berkeley's system would be attended with the most fatal consequences; and that it would be equally dangerous to the rest of mankind, I cannot doubt, so long as I believe their nature and mine to be the same.

Though it be absurd to attempt a proof of what is self-evident, it is manly and meritorious to confute the objections that sophistry may urge against it. This, with respect to the subject in question, has been done, in a decisive and masterly manner, by the learned and sagacious Dr. Reid\*; who proves, that the reasonings of Berkeley, and others, concerning primary and secondary qualities†, owe all their strength to the ambiguity of words. I have proved, that, though this fundamental error had never been detected, the philosophy of Berkeley is in its own nature absurd, because it supposes the original principles of common sense controvertible and fallacious: a supposition repugnant to the ge-

\* Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense.

† Des Cartes, Locke, and Berkeley suppose, that what we call a *body* is nothing but a collection of qualities; and these they divide into *primary* and *secondary*. Of the former kind are magnitude, extension, solidity, &c. which Locke and the Cartesians allow to belong to bodies at all times, whether perceived or not. Of the latter kind are the *heat* of fire, the *smell* and *taste* of a rose, &c. and these, by the same authors, and by Berkeley, are said to exist not in the bodies themselves, but only in the mind that perceives them: an error they are led into by supposing, that the words *heat*, *taste*, *smell*, &c. signify nothing but a *perception*; whereas we have formerly shown, that they also signify an *external thing*. Berkeley, following the hints which he found in Des Cartes, Malebranche and Locke, has applied the same mode of reasoning to prove, that primary, as well as secondary qualities, have no external existence; and consequently, that body (which consists of these two classes of qualities, and nothing else) exists only as an idea in the mind that perceives it, and exists no longer than while it is perceived.



nus of true philosophy ; and which leads to universal credulity, or universal scepticism ; and, consequently, to the subversion of knowledge and virtue, and the extermination of the human species.

It is proper, before we proceed to the next instance, to make a remark or two on what has been said.

1. Here we have an instance of a doctrine advanced by some philosophers, in direct contradiction to the general belief of all men in all ages.

2. The reasoning by which it is supported, though long accounted unanswerable, did never produce a serious and steady conviction. Common sense still declared the doctrine to be false ; we were sorry to find the powers of human reason so limited, as not to afford a logical confutation of it ; we were convinced it merited confutation, and flattered ourselves, that one time or other it would be confuted.

3. The real and general belief of this doctrine would be attended with fatal consequences to science, and to human nature : for this is a doctrine according to which a man could not act nor reason in the common affairs of life, without incurring the charge of insanity or folly, and involving himself in distress and perdition.

4. An ingenious man, from a sense of the bad tendency of this doctrine, applies himself to examine the principles on which it is founded ; discovers them to be erroneous ; and proves, to the full conviction of all competent judges, that from beginning to end it is all a mystery of falsehood, arising from the use of ambiguous expressions, and from the gratuitous admission of principles which never could have been admitted if they had been thoroughly understood.

## SECT. III.

*Of Liberty and Necessity.*

THE second instance to which I purpose to apply the principles of this discourse, by showing the danger of carrying any investigation beyond the dictates of common sense, is no other than the celebrated question concerning liberty and necessity; a question on which many things have been said, and some things, I presume, to little purpose. To enter into all the particulars of this controversy, is foreign to my present design; and I would not wish to add to a dispute already too bulky. My intention is, to treat the doctrine of necessity as I treated that of the non-existence of matter; by enquiring, whether the one be not, as well as the other, contrary to common sense, and therefore absurd.

1. That certain intentions and actions are in themselves, and previous to all consideration of their consequences, good, laudable, and meritorious; and that other actions and intentions are bad, blameable, and worthy of punishment,—has been felt and acknowledged by all reasonable creatures in all ages and nations. We need not wonder at the universality of this sentiment: it is as natural to the human constitution, as the faculties of hearing, seeing, and memory; it is as clear, unequivocal, and affecting, as any intimation from any sense external or internal.

2. That we cannot do some things, but have it in our power to do others, is what no man in his senses will hesitate to affirm. I can take up my staff from the ground, but I cannot lift a stone of a thousand weight. On a common, I may walk southward or northward, eastward or westward; but I cannot ascend to the clouds, nor sink downward to the cen-



tre of the earth. Just now I have power to think of an absent friend, of the Peak of Teneriffe, of a passage in Homer, or of the death of Charles I. When a man asks me a question, I have it in my power to answer or be silent, to answer softly or roughly, in terms of respect or in terms of contempt. Frequent temptations to vice fall in my way ; I may yield, or I may resist : if I resist, I applaud myself, because I am conscious it was in my power to do otherwise ; if I yield, I am filled with shame and remorse, for having neglected to do what I might have done, and ought to have done. My liberty in these instances I cannot prove by argument ; but there is not a truth in geometry of which I am more certain.

Is not this doctrine sufficiently obvious ? Must I quote Epictetus, or any other ancient author, to prove that men were of the same opinion in former times ? No idea occurs more frequently in my reading and conversation, than that of *power* or *agency* ; and I think I understand my own meaning as well when I speak of it, as when I speak of any thing else. But this idea has had the misfortune to come under the examination of Mr. Hume, who, according to custom, has found means so to darken and disfigure it, that, till we have cleared it of his misrepresentations, we cannot proceed any further in the present subject. And we are the more inclined to digress on this occasion, that he has made his theory of power the ground of some atheistical inferences, which we should not scruple at any time to step out of our way to overturn.—Perhaps these frequent digressions are offensive to the reader : they are equally so to the writer. To remove rubbish is neither an elegant nor a pleasant work, but it is often necessary. It is peculiarly necessary in the philosophy of human nature. The road to moral truth has been left in such a plight by some modern

projectors, that a man of honesty and plain sense must either, with great labour, and loss of time, delve his way through, or be swallowed up in a quagmire. The metaphysician advances more easily. His levity, perhaps, enables him, like Camilla in Virgil, to skim along the surface without sinking; or perhaps, the extreme subtlety of his genius can, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, penetrate this chaos, without being much incumbered or retarded in his progress. But men of ordinary talents have not those advantages, and must therefore be allowed to flounce along, though with no very graceful motion, the best way they can.

All ideas, according to Mr. Hume's fundamental hypothesis, are copied from and represent impressions: But we have never any impression that contains any power or efficacy: We never, therefore, have any idea of power\*. In proof of the minor proposition of this syllogism, he remarks, "That when we think we perceive our mind acting on matter, or one piece of matter acting upon another, we do in fact perceive only two objects or events contiguous and successive, the second of which is always found in experience to follow the first; but that we never perceive, either by external sense, or by consciousness, that power, energy, or efficacy, which connects the one event with the other. By observing that the two events do always accompany each other, the imagination acquires a habit of going readily from the first to the second, and from the second to the first; and hence we are led to conceive a kind of necessary connexion between them. But in fact there is neither necessity nor power in the objects we consider, but only in the mind that considers them; and even in the mind, this power of necessity is nothing but a

\* *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 282.



determination of the fancy, acquired by habit, to pass from the idea of an object to that of its usual attendant\*.”——So that what we call the efficacy of a cause to produce an effect, is neither in the cause nor in the effect, but only in the imagination, which has contracted a habit of passing from the object called the cause, to the object called the effect, and thus associating them together. Has the fire a power to melt lead? No; but the fancy is determined by habit to pass from the idea of fire to that of melted lead, on account of our having always perceived them contiguous and successive—and this is the whole matter. Have I a power to move my arm? No; the volition that precedes the motion of my arm has no connexion with that motion; but the motion having been always observed to follow the volition, comes to be associated with it in the fancy; and what we call the power, or necessary connexion, has nothing to do either with the volition or with the motion, but is merely a determination of my fancy, or your fancy, or any body’s fancy, to associate the idea or impression of my volition with the impression or idea of the motion of my arm.—I am sorry I cannot express myself more clearly; but I should not do justice to my author, if I did not imitate his obscurity on the present occasion: plain words will never do when one has an unintelligible doctrine to support.

What shall we say to this collection of strange phrases? or what name shall we give it? Shall we call it a most ingenious discovery, illustrated by a most ingenious argument? This would be complimenting the author at a very great expense; for this would imply, not only that Mr. Hume is the wisest of mortal men, but also that he is the only individual of that species of animals who is not a

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 272 300.

fool. Certain it is, that all men have in all ages talked, and argued, and acted, from a persuasion that they had a very distinct notion of power. If our author can prove, that they had no such notion, he can also prove, that all human discourse is nonsense, all human actions absurdity, and all human compositions (his own not excepted) words without meaning. The boldness of this theory, will, however, pass with many, for a proof of its being ingenious. Be it so, Gentlemen, I dispute not about epithets; if you will have it, that genius consisteth in the art of putting words together so as to form absurd propositions, I have nothing more to say. Others will admire this doctrine, because the words by which the author means to illustrate and prove it, if printed on a good paper, and with an elegant type, would of themselves make a pretty sizeable volume. It were pity to deprive these people of the pleasure of admiring; otherwise I might tell them, that nothing is more easy than this method of composition; for that I would undertake, at a very short warning, (if it could be done innocently, and without prejudice to my health), to write as many pages, with equal appearance of reason and argument, and with equal advantage to philosophy and mankind, in vindication of any given absurdity: provided only, that (like the absurdity in question) it were expressed in words of which one at least is ambiguous.

In truth, I am so little disposed to admire this extraordinary paradox, that nothing could make me believe its author to have been in earnest, if I had not found him drawing inferences from it too serious to be jested with by any person who is not absolutely distracted. It is one of Mr. Hume's maxims, That we can never have reason to believe, that any object, or quality of an object, exists, of



which we cannot form an idea\*. But, according to this astonishing theory of power, and causation, we can form *no idea* of power, nor of any being endowed with any power, *much less* of one endowed with infinite power†. The inference is——what I do not choose to commit to paper. But our elegant author is not so superstitious. He often puts his readers in mind, that this inference, or something very like it, is deducible from his doctrine‡: ——for which, no doubt, every friend to truth, virtue, and human nature, is infinitely obliged to him!

But what do you say in opposition to my theory? You affect to treat it with a contempt which hardly becomes you, and which my philosophy has not met with from your betters! pray let us hear your arguments.—And do you, Sir, really think it incumbent on me to prove it by argument, that I, and all other men, have a notion of power; and that the efficacy of a cause (of fire, for instance, to melt lead) is in the cause, and not in my mind? Would you think it incumbent on me to confute you with arguments, if you were pleased to affirm, that all men have tails and cloven feet; and that it was I who produced the earthquake that destroyed Lisbon, the plague that depopulates Constantinople, the heat that scorches the wilds of Africa, and the cold that freezes the Hyperborean ocean? Truly, Sir, I have not the face to undertake a direct confutation of what I do not understand; and I am so far from comprehending this part of your system, that I will venture to pronounce it perfect-

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 302.

† Some readers will smile perhaps, at the phraseology of this sentence; but I quote the author's own words. See Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 432.

‡ Treatise of Human Nature, p. 284, 291, 306, 431.

ly unintelligible. I know there are some who say they understand it; but I also know, that there are some who speak, and read, and write too, with very little expense of thought.

These are all but evasions, you exclaim; and insist on my coming to the point. Never fear, Sir; I am too deeply interested in some of the consequences of this theory of yours, to put you off with evasions. To come therefore to the point, I shall first state your doctrine in your own words, that there may be no risk of misrepresentation; and then if I should not be able *directly* to prove it false, (for the reason already given), I shall demonstrate, *indirectly* at least, or by the apagogical method, that it is not, and cannot possibly be true.

“As the necessity,” says Mr. Hume, “which makes two times two equal to four, or three angles of a triangle equal to two right ones, lies only in the act of the understanding, by which we consider and compare these ideas\*, in like manner, the necessity or power which unites causes and effects, lies in the determination of the mind to pass from the one to the other. The efficacy, or energy, of causes is neither placed in the causes themselves, nor in the Deity, nor in the concurrence of these two principles; but belongs entirely to the soul, which considers the union of two or more objects in all past instances. It is here that the real power of causes is placed along with their connexion and necessity†.”

\* What! is it my understanding that makes two and two equal to four! Was it not so before I was born, and would it not be so though all intelligence were to cease throughout the universe!—But it is idle to spend time in confuting what every child who has learned the very first elements of science, knows to be absurd.

† Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 291.



To find that his principles lead to atheism, would stagger an ordinary philosopher, and make him suspect his fundamental hypothesis, and all his subsequent reasonings. But the author now quoted is not staggered by considerations of this kind. On the contrary, he is so intoxicated with his discovery, that, however sceptical in other points, he seems willing to admit this as one certain conclusion\*.

If a man can reconcile himself to atheism, which is the greatest of all absurdities, I fear, I shall hardly put him out of conceit with his doctrine, when I show him that other less enormous absurdities are implied in it. We may make the trial however. Gentlemen are sometimes pleased to entertain unaccountable prejudices against their Maker; who yet, in other matters, where neither fashion nor hypothesis interfere, condescend to acknowledge, that the good old distinction between truth and falsehood is not altogether without foundation.

On the supposition that we have no idea of power or energy, and that the preceding theory of

\* Speaking of it in another place, he says, "A conclusion which is somewhat extraordinary, but which seems founded on sufficient evidence. Nor will its evidence be weakened by any general diffidence of the understanding, or sceptical suspicion, concerning every conclusion which is new or extraordinary. No conclusion can be more agreeable to scepticism than such as make discoveries concerning the weakness and narrow limits of human reason and capacity."

*Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 87. edit. 1767.*

I know not what discoveries this conclusion may lead others to make concerning our author's reason and capacity: but I have some ground to think, that in him it has not wrought any extraordinary self-abasement; otherwise he would not have asserted, with so much confidence, what he acknowledges to be a *most violent paradox*, and what is indeed contrary to the experience and conviction of every person of common sense. See *Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 291, 299.*

causation is just, our author gives the following definition of a cause ; which seems to be fairly enough deduced from his theory, and which he says is the best that he can give. “ A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other\*.” There are now in my view two contiguous houses, one of which was built last summer, and the other two years ago. By seeing them constantly together for several months, I find, that the idea of the one determines my mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other. So that, according to our author’s definition, the one house is the cause, and the other the effect!—Again, day and night have always been contiguous and successive; the imagination naturally runs from the idea or impression of the one to the idea of the other: consequently, according to the same profound theory and definition, either day is the cause of night, or night the cause of day, just as we consider the one or the other to have been originally prior in time: that is, in other words, light is either the cause or the effect of darkness; and its being the one or the other, depends entirely on my imagination! Let those admire this discovery who understand it.

Causation† implies more than priority and contiguity of the cause to the effect. This relation cannot be conceived at all, without a supposition of

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 298.

† *Causation*. in Mr. Hume’s style, denotes *the relation of cause and effect*. In English authors, the word rarely occurs, and never, I think, in this sense. It properly signifies, *The act or power of causing*.



power or energy in the cause†. Let the reader recollect two things that stand related as cause and effect; let him contemplate them with a view to this relation; then let him conceive the cause divested of all power; and he must at the same instant conceive, that it is a cause no longer: for a cause divested of power, is divested of that by which it is a cause. If a man, after examining his notions of causation in this manner, is conscious that he has an idea of power, then I say he has that idea. If all men, in all ages, have used the word *power*, or something synonymous to it, and if all men know what they mean when they speak of power, I maintain, that all men have a notion, conception, or idea of power, in whatever way they came by it: and I also maintain, that no true philosopher ever denied the existence or reality of any thing, merely because he could not give an account of its origin, or because the opinion commonly received concerning its origin did not happen to quadrate with his system.

When, therefore, Mr. Hume says, that the efficacy or energy of causes is not placed in the causes themselves, he says neither less nor more than this, that what is essential to a cause is not in a cause; or, in other words,—that a cause is not a cause.—Are there any persons who, upon the authority of this theorist, have rashly adopted atheistical principles? I know there are such. Ye blinded followers of a blind guide, ye dupes of unmeaning words and incomprehensible arguments, behold on what a champion ye have placed your confidence! All the comfort I can give you is, that if it be possible for the same thing at the same

† Non sic causa intelligi debet, ut quod cuique antecedit id ei causa sit, sed quod cuique *efficienter* antecedit.

*Cicero De Fato. cap. 15.*

time to be and not to be, you may possibly be in the right.

It follows from what has been said, that we cannot admit this theory of power and causation, without admitting, at the same time, the grossest and most impious absurdities. Is this a sufficient confutation of it? I think it is. If any person think otherwise, I take a shorter method, and utterly deny all the premises from which this strange conclusion is supposed to result. I deny the doctrine of impressions and ideas, as the author has explained it; nay, I have already affirmed, and proved it to be not only false, but unintelligible. And I maintain, that though it could be shown, that all simple ideas are derived from impressions, or intimations of sense, it is true, notwithstanding, that all men have an idea of power. They get it by experience, that is, by intimations of sense, both external and internal. Their mind acting upon their body gives them this notion or idea; their body acting on other bodies, and acted on by other bodies, gives them the same idea; which is also suggested by all the effects and changes they see produced in the universe. So thoroughly are we acquainted with it, that we can in cases innumerable, determine, with the utmost accuracy and certainty, the degree of power necessary to produce a given effect.

I repeat, therefore, notwithstanding all our author has said, or can say, to the contrary, that some things are in our power, and others are not; and that we perfectly understand our own meaning when we say so.—That the reader may not lose any chain in our reasoning, he will please to look back to the second and third paragraphs of this section.

3. By attending to my own internal feelings, and to the evidence given by other men of theirs;



I am sensible, that I deserve reward or punishment for those actions only which are in my own power. I am no more accountable for the evil which I can neither prevent nor remedy, than for the destruction of Troy, or the plagues of Egypt; and for the good which happens by my means, but against my will, I no more deserve reward or praise, than if I were a piece of inanimate matter.

This is the doctrine of common sense; and this doctrine has in all ages been supported by some of the most powerful principles of our nature; by principles which, in the common affairs of life, no man dares suppose to be equivocal or fallacious. A man may as well tell me that I am blind, or deaf, or that I feel no heat when I approach the fire, as that I have not a natural sentiment disposing me to blame intentional injury, and to praise intentional beneficence; and which makes me feel and be conscious, that the evil I am compelled to do is not criminal, and that the good I perform against my will is not meritorious. That other men are conscious of the same sentiment, I know with as much certainty as I can know any thing of what passes in the mind of other men; for I have daily and hourly opportunities of making observations in regard to this very point. The greatest part of conversation turns upon the morality of human actions; and I never yet heard any person seriously blamed or applauded, by a reasonable creature, for an action in the performance of which he was not considered as a free agent\*. The most

\* Si omnia fato fiunt, omnia fiunt causa antecedente; et, si appetitus, illa etiam quæ appetitum sequuntur: ergo, etiam assensiones. At si causa appetitus non est sita in nobis, ne ipse quidem appetitus est in nostra potestate. Quod si ita est, ne illa quidem quæ appetitu efficiuntur sunt sita in nobis. Non sunt igitur, neque assensiones neque actiones, in nostra potestate: ex quo efficitur, ut nec laudationes justæ sint, nec vitu-

rigid Predestinarians suppose freedom of will to be in one way or other consistent with eternal and unconditional decrees: if they cannot explain in what way,—they call it a mystery; it surpasses their understanding;—but it must be so, for otherwise the morality of actions is altogether inconceivable†. Do the interests of science, or of virtue, suffer by this representation of the matter? I think not. But some philosophers, not satisfied with this view of it, are for bringing the sentiment of moral liberty to the test of reason. They want to prove by argument, either that I have, or that I

*perationes, nec honores, nec supplicia. Quod cum vitiosum sit, probabiliter concludi putant, non omnia fato fieri quæcumque fiant.*

*Cicero, De Fato, cap. 17.*

† The reader, I hope, does not think me such a novice in reasoning, as to urge the judgment of the council of Trent in behalf of any doctrine, philosophical or religious. Yet every fact in logic and morals is worth our notice, if we would establish those sciences on their only firm foundation, the universal consent and practice of mankind: It deserves, therefore, to be remarked, that, at the Reformation, this consciousness of free will was acknowledged both by the Lutherans, and by the church of Rome, to be a principle of common sense, which was to be ascertained not by reasoning, but by experimental proof. So says a most judicious and elegant historian, whose words are remarkably apposite to the present subject, and to the manner in which we treat it. Speaking of some articles said to be maintained by the Lutherans, in opposition to free will, the historian informs us, that, in the judgment of many of that celebrated council, the opinion implied in these articles, “*E empia, e biasfema contra Dio.—Ch’ era una pazzia contra il senso comune, sperimentando ogni uomo la propria libertà, che non merita contestatione, ma, comme Aristòtele dice, o castigo, o prova sperimentale. Che i medesimi discepoli di Iuthero s’erano accorti della pazzia; e, moderando l’assurdità, dissero poi, esservi libertà nell’uomo in quello, che tocca le attioni esterne politiche ed economiche, e quanto ad ogni giustizia civile; le quali e sciocco chi non conosce venir dal consiglio ed ellectione; restringendosi a negar la libertà quanta alla sola giustizia divina.*” *Istoria del Concilio Trid. di P. Sarpi. lib. 2.*



have not, such a feeling: or, if I shall be found to have it, they want to know whether it be fallacious or not. In other words, they want to prove or to disprove, what I know by instinct to be unquestionably certain; or they want to inquire, whether it be reasonable for me to act and think according to a principle, which, by the law of my nature, I cannot contradict, either in thought or action. Would not the same spirit of inquiry lead a geometrician to attempt a proof or confutation of his axioms; a natural philosopher to doubt whether things be what his senses represent them; an ordinary man to argue concerning the propriety of perceiving colours by the eyes, and odours by the nostrils? Would not the same spirit of doubt and disputation, applied to more familiar instances, transform a philosopher into a madman, and a person of plain sense into an idiot?

But let us not be too rigid. If a philosopher must needs have his rattles and playthings, let him have them: only, for his own sake, and for the sake of the neighbours, I would advise, that edge-tools, and other dangerous instruments of amusement, be kept out of his reach. If a Cartesian will not, on any account, believe his own existence, except I grant him his *Cogito, ergo sum*, far be it from me to deprive the poor man of that consolation. The reasoning indeed is bad, but the principle is good; and a good principle is so good a thing, that rather than oblige a man to renounce it, I would dispense with the strict observance of a logical precept. If a star-gazer cannot see the inhabitants of the moon with one perspective, let him tie a score of them together, with all my heart. If a virtuoso is inclined to look at the sun through a microscope, and at a rotten cheese through a telescope, to apply ear-trumpets to his eyes, and equip his two ears with as many pairs of

spectacles, he has my full permission; and much good may it do him. These amusements are idle, but they are innocent. The Cartesian, if the truth were known, would be found neither the better nor the worse for his enthymeme. The star-gazer has not atchieved a single glimpse of his lunar friends, but sees more confusedly than before: however he may console himself with this reflection, that one may pass through life with the character of a very honest and tolerably happy man, though he should never have it in his power to extend the sphere of his acquaintance beyond this sublunary globe. The virtuoso takes a wrong, and indeed a very preposterous method, for improving his sight and hearing; but if he is careful to confine these frolics to his private apartment, and never boast in public of his auditory, or optical apparatus, he may live comfortably and respectably enough, though he should never see the spots in the sun, nor the bristles on a mite's back.

I would however, earnestly exhort my friend the metaphysician, to believe himself a free agent upon the bare authority of his feelings, and not to imagine that Nature is such a bungler in her trade, as first to intend to impose upon him, and then inadvertently give him sagacity to see through the imposture. Indeed, if it were a matter of indifference, whether we believe our moral feelings or disbelieve them, I should not object to the use of a little unbelief now and then, by way of experiment or cordial, provided it were a thing that a reasonable man could take any pleasure in. But I am convinced, that habitual dram-drinking, is not more pernicious to our animal nature, than habitual scepticism to our rational. And when once this scepticism comes to affect our moral sentiments, or active principles, all is over with us: we



are in the condition of a man intoxicated; fit only for raving, dozing, and doing mischief.

But, alas! the metaphysician is too headstrong to follow my advice. It would be a fine thing, indeed, says he, if gentlemen were to yield to the dictates of nature. Is there a single dictate of nature to which people of fashion now-a-days pay any regard? No, no; the world is grown wiser. As to this sentiment of moral liberty, I very much question its title to be ranked with the dictates of nature. It seems to be a piece of vile sophistication, a paltry prejudice, hatched by the nurse, and fostered by the priest. I am determined to take it roundly to task, and examine its pretensions with the eye of a philosopher and freethinker.—

Very well, Sir, you may take your own way; it requires no skill in magic to be able to foretell the consequence. A traveller no sooner quits the right road, on supposition of its being wrong, than he gets into one that is really so. If you set out in your inquiry, with suspecting the principles of common sense to be erroneous, you have little chance of falling in with any other principles that are not erroneous.

The result of the metaphysical inquiry is as follows: "Every human action must proceed from some motive as its cause. The motive or cause must be sufficient to produce the action or effect; otherwise it is no motive: and, if sufficient to produce it, must necessarily produce it; for every effect proceeds necessarily from its cause, as heat necessarily proceeds from fire. Now, the immediate causes of action are volitions, or energies of the will: these arise necessarily from passions or appetites, which proceed necessarily from judgments or opinions; which are the necessary effect of external things, or of ideas, operating, according to the necessary laws of nature, upon our

senses, intellect, or fancy: and these ideas, or things, present themselves to our powers of perception, as necessarily as light presents itself when we turn our open eyes to the sun. In a word, every human action is the effect of a series of causes, each of which does necessarily produce its own proper effect; so that if the first operate, all the rest must follow. It is confessed, that an action may proceed immediately from volition, and may therefore properly be called voluntary: but the *primum mobile* or first cause, even of a voluntary action, is something as independent on our will, as the production of the great-grandfather is independent on the grandson. Between physical and moral necessity there is no difference; the phenomena of the moral world being no less necessary than those of the material. And, to conclude, if we are conscious of a feeling or sentiment of moral liberty, it must be a deceitful one; for no past action of our lives could have been prevented, and no future action can possibly be contingent. Therefore man is not a free, but a necessary agent."

This is just such a conclusion as I should have expected; for thus it always has been, and will be, when the dictates of common sense are questioned and disputed. The existence of body, the existence of the soul, the reality of our idea of power, the difference between moral and intellectual virtue, the certainty of the inference from an effect to the cause, and many other such truths, dictates of common sense, have been called in question, and argued upon. And what is the result? Why truly it has been found, that there is no body, that there is no soul, that we have no idea of power, that moral and intellectual virtue are not different, and that a cause is not necessary to the production of that which hath a beginning. And now the liberty of human actions is questioned and debated, what



could we expect, but that it would share the same fate! But passing this for the present\*, which, however, seems to merit attention, we shall here only inquire, whether this doctrine of necessity be not in some important points extremely similar to that of the non-existence of matter.

1. Of this doctrine we observe, in the first place, that, if any regard is to be had to the meaning of words, and if human actions may reasonably be taken for the signs of human sentiments, all mankind have, in all ages, been of a different opinion. The number of professed philosophers who have maintained that all things happen through unavoidable necessity, is but small; nor are we to imagine that all the ancient Fatalists were of this number. The Stoics were Fatalists by profession; but they still endeavoured as well as they could, to reconcile fate with moral freedom†; and the first sentence of the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus contains a declaration, that “opinion, pursuit, desire, and aversion, and, in one word, whatever are our own actions, are in our own power.” We see in Cicero’s fragment *De Fato*, and in the beginning of the

\* Some readers may possibly, on this occasion, call to mind a saying of an old Greek author, who, though now obsolete, was in his day, and for several ages after, accounted a man of considerable penetration. I neither mention his name, nor translate his words, for fear of offending (pardon a fond author’s vanity) *my polite readers*. ΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝ ΤΗΝ ΑΓΑΠΗΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑΣ ΟΥΚ ΕΔΕΞΑΝΤΟ—ΔΙΑ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΠΕΜΨΕΙ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ‘Ο ΘΕΟΣ ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑΝ ΠΛΑΝΗΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΥΣ ΤΩ ΨΕΥΔΕΙ.

† “By Fate the Stoics seem to have understood a series of events appointed by the immutable counsels of God; or, that law of his providence by which he governs the world. It is evident by their writings, that they meant it in no sense which interferes with the liberty of human actions.”

See Mrs. Carter’s admirable Introduction to her very elegant translation of the works of Epictetus, sect. 17.

sixth book of Aulus Gellius, by what subterfuges and quibbling distinctions the Stoic Chrysippus reconciled the seemingly opposite principles of fate and free-will. I am not surprised, that what he says on this subject is unsatisfactory: for many Christians have puzzled themselves to no purpose in the same argument. But though the manner in which the divine prescience is exerted, be mysterious and inexplicable, it does not follow, that the freedom of our will is equally so. Of this we may be, and we are, competent judges. It is sufficiently intimated to every man by his own experience; and every man is satisfied with this intimation, and by his conduct declares, that he trusts to it as certain and authentic. Nothing can be a clearer proof, that the sentiment of moral Liberty is one of the most powerful in human nature, than its having been so long able to maintain its ground, and often in opposition to other popular opinions apparently repugnant. The notion of fate has prevailed much in the world, and yet could never subvert this sentiment even in the vulgar.—If it be asked, where the vulgar opinions of ancient times are to be found? I answer, that in the writings of the most popular poets we have a chance to find them more genuine than in systems of philosophy. To advance paradoxes, and consequently to disguise facts, is often the most effectual recommendation of a philosopher: but a poet must conform himself to the general principles and manners of mankind; otherwise he can never become a general favourite.

Now the system of Homer and Virgil concerning fate and free-will, is perfectly explicit. "Homer assigns three causes," I quote the words of Pope, "of all the good and evil that happens in this world, which he takes a particular care to distinguish. First, the will of God, superior to all. Secondly



Destiny or fate, meaning the laws and order of nature, affecting the constitutions of men, and disposing them to good or evil, prosperity or misfortune; which the Supreme Being, if it be his pleasure, may over-rule, (as Jupiter is inclined to do in the case of Sarpedon\*); but which he generally suffers to take effect. Thirdly, Our own free will, which either by prudence overcomes those natural influences and passions, or by folly suffers us to fall under them†.” In regard to some of the decrees of fate, Homer informs us, that they were conditional, or such as could not take effect, except certain actions were performed by men. Thus Achilles had it in his power to continue at Troy, or to return home before the end of the war. If he chose to stay, his life would be short and glorious; if to return, he was to enjoy peace and leisure to a good old age‡. He prefers the former, though he well

• Iliad, xvi. 433.

† Iliad, i. 5. xix. 90. Odyss. i. 7. 39. See Pope's notes on these passages.

‡ Μητηρ γαρ τε με φησι θεα, Θέτις αργυροπεζα,  
Διχθαδίας κηρας φερεμεν θανατοιο τελοσδε—&c.

Iliad, ix. 410.

My fates long since by Thetis were disclos'd  
And each alternate, life or fame propos'd.  
Here if I stay before the Trojan town,  
Short is my date, but deathless my renown;  
If I return, I quit immortal praise  
For years on years, and long extended days.—Pope.

On voit (says M. Dacier, in her note on this passage) partout dans Homere des marques qu'il avoit connu cette double destinée des hommes, si necessaire pour accorder le libre arbitre avec la predestination. En voicy un tesmoignage bien formel et bien exprès. Il y a deux chemins pour tous les hommes: s'ils prennent celuy-la, il leur arrivera telle chose; s'ils prennent celui-cy, leur sort sera different.

Sophocles, in like manner, represents the decree of Destiny concerning Ajax, as conditional. The anger of Minerva against that hero was to last only one day: if his friends kept

knew what was to follow : and I know not whether there be any other circumstance in the character of this hero, except his love to his friend and to his father, which so powerfully recommends him to our regard. This gloomy resolution invests him with a mournful dignity, the effects of which a reader of sensibility often feels at his heart, in a sentiment made up of admiration, pity, and horror. But this by the bye.—According to Virgil, the completion, even of the absolute decrees of fate, may be retarded by the agency of beings inferior to Jupiter\*: a certain term is fixed to every man, beyond which his life cannot last ; but before this period arrives, he may die, by accidental misfortune, or deserved punishment † : to virtue and vice necessity reaches not at all‡.

him within doors during that space, all would be well ; if they suffered him to go abroad unattended, his death was inevitable. *Ajax Mastig.* 772. 794. 818. *Εἰ μὲν ἐνδὸν μένει* (says the scholiast), *σωθήσεται· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἀπολλύται. διὰ τοῦτο δὲ τὸ διττὸν τῆ μοιρίου δῆλοι ὡς καὶ Ὅμηρος, Διχθαδίας κήρας φερέμεν θανάτοιο τελοσδε.*

*Sophocles, apud H. Steph.* 1588. p. 48.

\* Non dabitur regnis (esto) prohibere Latinis,  
Atque immota manet fatis Lavinia conjux ;  
At trahere, atque moras tantis licet addere rebus.

*Æneid.* vii. 313.

† Nam quia nec fato, merita nec morte peribat,  
Sed misera ante diem, subitoque accensa furore,  
Nondum ille flavum Proserpina vertice crinem  
Abstulerat. ————— *Æneid.* iv. 696.

‡ Stat sua cuique dies ; breve et irreparabile tempus  
Omnibus est vitæ ; sed famam extendere factis,  
Hoc virtutis opus. ————— *Æneid.* x. 467.

I agree with Servius (not. in *Æneid.* 'x.') that the philosophical maxims to be found in poets are not always consistent. The reason is plain: Poets imitate the sentiments of people of different characters, placed in different circumstances, and actuated by different passions ; and nobody expects, that the language or thoughts, suitable to a certain character, placed in



In all the histories I have read of ancient or modern, savage or civilized nations, I find the conduct of mankind has ever been such as I should expect from creatures possessed of moral freedom, and conscious of it. Several forms of false religion, and some erroneous commentaries on the true, have imposed tenets inconsistent with this freedom; but men have still acted, notwithstanding, as if they believed themselves to be free. Creeds, expressed in general terms, may easily be imposed on the ignorant, and the selfish; by the former they are misunderstood, by the latter disregarded: but to overpower a natural instinct is a difficult task; and a doctrine which is easily swallowed when proposed in general terms, may prove wholly disgusting when applied to a particular case.

“The belief of a destiny,” says Mr. Macaulay, in his history of St. Kilda\*, “is one of the strongest articles of this people’s creed; and it will possibly be found upon examination, that the common people in all ages, and in most countries, give into

certain circumstances, and actuated by certain passions, should be consistent with those of a different character, whose circumstances and passions are different. But I cannot agree with that annotator, in supposing the passage quoted from the fourth book, inconsistent with what is quoted from the 10th; and that the former is according to the Epicurean, and the latter according to the Stoical philosophy. In the latter passage, it is said, that a certain day or time is appointed by fate for the utmost limit of every man’s life: in the former, the very same thing is implied; only it is said further, that Dido died before her time; and there is nothing in the 10th book that insinuates the impossibility of this. The sentiments contained in these three quotations are conformable to Homer’s theology, and to one another; and it deserves our notice, that the first comes from the mouth of Juno, the second from the poet or his muse, and the third from Jupiter himself; whence I infer, that they were agreeable to the poet’s creed, or at least to the popular creed of his age.

\* P. 243.

the same notion. At St. Kilda, fate and providence are much the same thing. After having explained these terms, I asked some of the people there, Whether it was in their power to do good and evil? The answer made by those who were unacquainted with the systematical doctrines of divinity was, That the question was a very childish one; as every man alive must be conscious, that he himself is a free agent."—If it be true, as I believe it is, that the common people in most countries are inclined to acknowledge a destiny or fate; and if it be also true that they are conscious of their own free agency notwithstanding; this alone would convince me, though I had never consulted my own experience, that the sentiment of moral liberty is one of the strongest of human nature. For how many of their vices might they not excuse, if they could persuade themselves, or others, that these proceed from causes as independent on their will, as those from which storms, earthquakes, and eclipses arise, and the temperature of soils and seasons, and the sound and unsound constitutions of the human body! Such a persuasion, however, we find not that they have at any time entertained or attempted; from which I think there is good reason to conclude, that it is not in their power.

There is no principle in man, religion excepted, that has produced so great revolutions, and makes such a figure in the history of the world, as the love of political liberty: of which indeed all men do not form the same notion: some placing it in the power of doing what they please, others in the power of doing what is lawful; some in being governed by laws of their own making, and others in being governed by equitable laws, and tried by equitable judges;—but of which it is universally agreed that it leaves in our power many of our most important actions. And yet say Mr. Hume and the Fatalists,



all things happen through irresistible necessity, and there is not in the human mind any idea of any power. Strange! that so many, especially among the best, the bravest, and the wisest of men, should have been so passionately enamoured of an inconceivable non-entity, as to abandon for its sake, their ease, their health, their fortunes, and their lives! At this rate we are wonderfully mistaken, when we speak of Don Quixote as a madman, and of Leonidas, Brutus, Wallace, Hampden, Paoli, as wise, and good, and great! The case it seems is just the reverse; these heroes deserve no other name than that of raving bedlamites; and the illustrious knight of La Mancha, to whom the object of his valour was at least *a conceivable phantom*, was a person of excellent understanding and most perfect knowledge of the world!

Do not all mankind distinguish between mere harm and injury? Is there one rational being unacquainted with this distinction? If a man were to act as if he did not comprehend it, would not the world pronounce him a fool? And yet this distinction is perfectly incomprehensible, except we suppose some beings to act necessarily, and others from free choice. A man gives me a blow, and instantly I feel resentment; but a bystander informs me, that the man is afflicted with the epilepsy, which deprives him of the power of managing his limbs; that the blow was not only without design, but contrary to his intention, and that he could not possibly have prevented it. My resentment is gone, though I still feel pain from the blow. Can there be any mistake in this experience? Can I think that I feel resentment, when in reality I do not feel it? that I feel no resentment, when I am conscious of the contrary? And if I feel resentment in the one case, and not in the other, it is certain there seems to me to be some dissimilitude between

them. But it is only in respect of the intention of him who gave the blow that there can be any dissimilitude ; for all that I learn from the information by which my resentment was extinguished is, that what I supposed to proceed from an evil intention, did really proceed from no evil intention, but from the necessary effect of a material cause, in which the will had no concern. What shall we say then ? that the distinction between injury and mere harm, acknowledged by all mankind, does imply, that all mankind suppose the actions of moral beings to be free ? or shall we say, that resentment, though it arises uniformly in all men on certain occasions, does yet proceed from no cause ; the actions, which do give rise to it, being in every respect the same with those, which do not give rise to it ?

Further, all men expect, with full assurance, that fire will burn to-morrow ; but all men do not with full assurance expect, that a thief will steal to-morrow, or a miser refuse an alms to a beggar, or a debauchee commit an act of intemperance, even though opportunities offer. If I had found on blowing up my fire this morning, that the flame was cold, and converted water into ice, I should have been much more astonished than if I had detected a man reputed honest in the commission of an act of theft. The former I would call a prodigy, a contradiction to the known laws of nature : of the latter I should say, that I am sorry for it, and could never have expected it ; but I should not suppose any prodigy in the case. All general rules, that regard the influence of human characters on human actions, admit of exceptions ; but the general laws of matter admit of none. Ice was cold, and fire hot, ever since the creation ; hot ice, and cold fire, are according to the present constitution of the world, impossible : but that a man should steal to-day, who never stole be-



fore, is no impossibility at all. The coldness of the flame I should doubtless think owing to some cause, and the dishonesty of the man to some strange revolution in his sentiments and principles ; but I never could bring myself to think the man as passive, in regard to this revolution, as the fire must be supposed to be in regard to the cause by which its nature is changed. The man has done what he ought not to have done, what he might have prevented, and what he deserves punishment for not preventing ;—this is the language of all rational beings ;—but the fire is wholly unconscious and inert. Who will say that there is the same necessity in both cases !

Fatalists are fond of inferring moral necessity from physical, in the way of analogy. But some of their arguments on this topic are most ridiculously absurd. “ There is,” says Voltaire’s *Ignorant Philosopher* “ nothing without a cause. An effect without a cause are words without meaning. Every time I have a will, this can only be in consequence of my judgment good or bad ; this judgment is necessary ; therefore so is my will.”—All this hath been said by others : but what follows is, I believe, peculiar to this *Ignorant Philosopher*. “ In effect,” continues he, “ it would be very singular, that all nature, all the planets, should obey eternal laws, and that there should be a little animal, five feet high, who, in contempt of these laws, could act as he pleased, solely according to his caprice.” Singular ! aye singular indeed. So very singular, that yours, Sir, if I mistake not, is the first human brain that ever conceived such a notion. If man be free, nobody ever dreamed that he made himself so in contempt of the laws of nature ; it is in consequence of a law of nature that he is a free agent. But passing this, let us attend to the reasoning. The planets are not free agents ;—therefore it would

be very singular, that man should be one. Not a whit more singular, than that this same animal of five feet should perceive, and think, and read, and write, and speak; which no astronomer of my acquaintance has ever supposed to belong to the planets, notwithstanding their brilliant appearance, and stupendous magnitude\*. We do too much honour to such reasoning, when we reply to it in the bold but sublime words of a great genius:

Know'st thou th' importance of a soul immortal?  
Behold this midnight glory, worlds on worlds?  
Amazing pomp! redouble this amaze;  
Ten thousand add; and twice ten thousand more;  
Then weigh the whole; ONE SOUL out-weighs them all,  
And calls th' astonishing magnificence  
Of unintelligent creation poor. *Complaint, Night 7.*

Mr. Hume, in an essay on this subject, maintains, that the appearances in the moral and material world are equally uniform, and equally necessary; nay, and acknowledged to be so, both by philosophers and by the vulgar. In proof of this, he prudently confines himself to general topics, on

\* Mr. Voltaire has often laboured, with more zeal than success, to prove, amongst other strange doctrines, that Shakespeare and Milton were no great poets. What if I should here help him to an argument as decisive on that point as any he has yet invented, and framed exactly according to the rules of his own logic, as exemplified in the passage now before us? "The English say, that Shakespeare and Milton were great poets. Now it is well known, that neither Plinlimmon in Wales, nor Mealfourvouny in Scotland, neither Lebanon in Syria, nor Atlas in Mauritania, ever wrote one good verse in their days; and yet each of these mountains exceeds in corporeal magnitude ten thousand Miltons and as many Shakespeares. But it would be very singular, that masses of so great distinction should never have been able to put pen to paper with any success, and yet that no fewer than two pieces of English flesh and blood, scarce six feet long, should in contempt of nature and all her laws, have penned poems that are entitled to general admiration!"



which he declaims with some plausibility. Had he descended to particular instances, as we have done, the fallacy of his reasoning would have appeared at once. Human nature has been nearly the same in all ages. True. For all men possess nearly the same faculties, which are employed about nearly the same objects, and destined to operate within the same narrow sphere. And if a man have power to choose one of two things, to act or not to act, he has all the liberty we contend for. How is it possible, then, that human nature, taken in the gross, should not be found nearly the same in all ages! But if we come to particulars, we shall not perhaps find two human minds exactly alike. In two of the most congenial characters on earth the same causes will not produce the same effects; nay, the same causes will not always produce the same effects even in the same character.

Some Fatalists deny, that our internal feelings are in favour of moral liberty. "It is true," says a worthy and ingenious, though fanciful, author, "that a man by internal feeling may prove his own free will, if by free will be meant the power of doing what a man wills or desires; or of resisting the motives of sensuality, ambition, &c. that is free will in the popular and practical sense. Every person may easily recollect instances, where he has done these several things. But these are intirely foreign to the present question. To prove that a man has free-will in the sense opposite to mechanism, he ought to feel, that he can do different things while the motives remain precisely the same. And here I apprehend the internal feelings are intirely against free-will, where the motives are of a sufficient magnitude to be evident: where they are not, nothing can be proved\*."—Questions

\* Hartley's Observations on man, vol. 1. p. 507.

of this kind would be more easily solved, if author's would explain their doctrine by examples. When this is not done, we cannot always be sure that we understand their meaning, especially in abstract subjects, where language, after all our care, is often equivocal and inadequate. If I rightly understand this author, and am allowed to examine his principles by my own experience, I must conclude, that he very much mistakes the fact. Let us take an example. A man is tempted to the commission of a crime: his motive to commit, is the love of money, or the gratification of appetite: his motive to abstain, is a regard to duty, or to reputation. Suppose him to weigh these motives in his mind, for an hour, a day, or a week; and suppose, that during this space, no additional consideration occurs to him on either side: which, I think, may be supposed, because I know it is possible, and I believe often happens. While his mind is in this state, the motives remain precisely the same: and yet it is to me inconceivable, that he should at any time, during this space, feel himself under a necessity of committing, or under a necessity of not committing the crime. He is indeed under a necessity either to do, or not to do: but every man, in such a case, feels that he has it in his power to choose the one or the other. At least, in all my experience I have never been conscious, nor had any reason to believe, that other men were conscious, of any such necessity as the author here speaks of.

Again: Suppose two men in the circumstances above mentioned, to yield to the temptation, and to be differently affected by a review of their conduct; the one repining at fortune, or fate, or Providence, for having placed him in too tempting a situation, and solicited him by motives too powerful to be resisted; the other blaming and upbraid



ing himself for yielding to the bad motive, and resisting the good:—I would ask, which of these two kinds of remorse or regret is the most rational? The first according to the doctrine of the Fatalists; the last, according to the universal opinion of mankind. No divine, no moralist, no man of sense, ever supposes true penitence to begin, till the criminal become conscious, that he has done, or neglected something which he ought not to have done or neglected: a sentiment which would be not only absurd, but impossible, if all criminals and guilty persons believed, from internal feeling, that what is done could not have been prevented. Whenever you can satisfy a man of this, he may continue to bewail himself or repine at fortune; but his repentance is at an end. It is always a part, and too often the whole, of the language of remorse: “I wish the deed had never been done; wretch that I was, not to resist the temptation!” Does this imply, that the penitent supposes himself to have been under a necessity of committing the action, and that his conduct could not possibly have been different from what it is? To me it seems to imply just the contrary. And am not I a competent judge of this matter? Have not I been in these circumstances? Has not this been often the language of my soul? And will any man pretend to say, that I do not know my own thoughts, or that he knows them better than I?—All men, indeed, have but too frequent experience of at least this part of repentance; then why multiply words, when by facts it is so easy to determine the controversy?

Other Fatalists acknowledge, that the free agency of man is universally felt and believed: That though man in truth is a necessary agent, having all his actions determined by fixed and immutable laws; yet, this being concealed from him, he acts

with the conviction of being a free agent\*.—Concealed from him! Who conceals it? Does the author of nature conceal it,—and do these writers discover it? What deference is not due to the judgment of a metaphysician, whose sagacity is so irresistibly (I had almost said omnipotently) penetrating! But, gentlemen, as ye are powerful, ye should have been merciful. It was not kind to rob poor mortals of this crumb of comfort which had been provided for them in their ignorance; nor generous to publish so openly the secrets of Heaven, and thus baffle the designs of Providence by a few strokes of your pen!—In truth, metaphysic is a perplexing affair to the passions, as well as to the judgment. Sometimes it is so absurd, that not to be merry is impossible; and sometimes so impious, that not to be angry were unpardonable: but often it partakes so much of both qualities, that one knows not with what temper of mind to consider it:

“To laugh, were want of goodness, and of grace;

“And to be grave, exceeds all power of face.”

But why insist so long on the universal acknowledgment of man's free agency? To me it is as evident, that all men believe themselves free, as that all men think. I cannot see the heart; I judge of the sentiments of others from their outward behaviour; from the highest to the lowest, as far as history and experience can carry me, I find the conduct of human beings similar in this respect to

\* In the former edition of this Essay, a particular book was here specified and quoted. But I have lately heard, that in a second edition of that book, which, however, I have not yet seen, the author has made some alterations, by which he gets clear of the absurdity exposed in this passage.



my own: and of my own free agency I have never yet been able to entertain the least doubt. "Here then we have an instance of a doctrine advanced by some philosophers, in direct contradiction to the general belief of all men in all ages." This is a repetition of the first remark formerly made on the non-existence of matter.

2. The second was to this purpose: "The reasoning by which this doctrine is supported, though long accounted unanswerable, did never produce a serious and steady conviction; common sense still declared it to be false; we were sorry to find the powers of human reason so limited as not to afford a logical confutation of it; we were convinced it merited confutation, and flattered ourselves that one time or other it would be confuted."

I shall here take it for granted, that the scheme of necessity has not as yet been fully confuted; and on this supposition (which the Fatalists can hardly fail to acknowledge a fair one) I would ask, whether the remark just now quoted be applicable to the reasonings urged in behalf of that scheme? My experience tells me, it is. After giving the advocates for necessity a fair hearing, my belief is exactly the same as before. I am puzzled perhaps, but not convinced, no not in the least degree. In reading some late essays on this subject, I find many things allowed to pass without scruple, which I cannot admit: and when I have got to the end, and ask myself, whether I am a free or a necessary agent, nature recurs upon me so irresistibly, that the investigation I have just finished, seems (as Shakespeare says) "like the fierce vexation of a dream," which, while it lasted, had some resemblance of reality, but now, when it is gone, appears to have been altogether a delusion. This is prejudice, you say; be it so. Before the confutation of Berkeley's system, would it have been called pre-

judice not to be convinced by his arguments? I know not but it might; but I am sure, that of such prejudice no honest man, nor lover of truth, needs be ashamed. I confess, that when I enter upon the controversy in question, I am not wholly indifferent; I am a little biassed in favour of common sense, and I cannot help it: yet if the reasoning were conclusive, I am confident it would breed in my mind some suspicion, that my sentiment of moral liberty is ambiguous. As I experience nothing of this kind, my conviction remaining the same as before, what must I infer? Surely I must infer, and I sin against my own understanding if I do not infer, that though the reasoning be subtle, the doctrine is absurd.

But what if a man be really convinced by that reasoning, that he is a necessary agent?—Then I expect he will think and act according to his conviction. If he continue to act and think as he did before, and as I and the rest of the world do now, he must pardon me if I should suspect his conviction to be insincere. For let it be observed, that the Fatalists are not satisfied with calling their doctrine probable; they affirm, that it is certain, and rests on evidence not inferior to demonstration. If, therefore, it convince at all, it must convince thoroughly. Between rejecting it as utterly false, and receiving it as undeniably true, there is no medium to a considerate person. And let it be observed further, that the changes which the real belief of fatality must produce in the conduct and sentiments of men, are not slight and imperceptible; but, as will appear afterwards, important and striking. If you say, that the instincts of your nature, the customs of the world, and the force of human laws, oblige you to act like free agents, you acknowledge fatality to be contrary to nature



and common sense; which is the point I want to prove.

Clay is not more obsequious to the potter, than words to the skillful disputant. They may be made to assume almost any form, to enforce almost any doctrine. So true it is, that much may be said on either side of most questions, that we have known dealers in controversy, who were always of the same mind with the author whom they read last. We have seen theories of morality deduced from pride, from sympathy, from self-love, from benevolence; and all so plausible, as would surprise one who is unacquainted with the ambiguities of language. Of these the advocates for simple truth are less careful to avail themselves, than their paradoxical antagonists. The arguments of the former, being more obvious, stand less in need of illustration; those of the latter require all the embellishments of eloquence and refinement to recommend them. Robbers seldom go abroad without arms; they examine every corner and countenance with a penetrating eye, which habitual distrust and circumspection have rendered intensely sagacious: the honest man walks carelessly about his business, intending no harm, and suspecting none. It cannot be denied, that philosophers do often, in the use of words, impose on themselves as well as on others; an ambiguous word slipping in by accident will often perplex a whole subject, to the equal surprise of both parties; and perhaps, in a long course of years, the cause of this perplexity shall not be discovered. This was never more remarkably the case, than in the controversy about the existence of matter; and this no doubt is one great hinderance to the utter confutation of the doctrine of necessity. Fatalists indeed, make a stir, and seem much in earnest about settling the signification of the words:

but "words beget words," as Bacon well observeth; and it cannot be expected, that they who are interested in supporting a system will be scrupulously impartial in their definitions.

With a few of these, a theorist commonly begins his system. This has the appearance of fairness and perspicuity. We hold it for a maxim, that a man may use words in any sense he pleases, provided he explain the sense in which he uses them; and we think it captious, to find fault with words. We therefore are easily prevailed on to admit his definitions, which are generally plausible, and not apparently repugnant to the analogy of language. But the understanding of the author when he writes, and that of the student, when he reads them, are in very different circumstances. The former knows his system already, and adapts his definitions to it: the latter is ignorant of the system, and therefore can have no notion of the tendency of the definitions. Besides, every system is in some degree obscure to one who is but beginning to study it; and this obscurity serves to disguise whatever in the preliminary illustrations is forced or inexplicit. Thus the mind of the most candid and most attentive reader is prepared for the reception of error, long before he has any suspicion of the author's real design. And then, the more he is accustomed to use words in a certain signification, the more he is disposed to think it natural; so that the further he advances in the system, he is still more and more reconciled to it. Need we wonder then at the variety of moral systems? need we wonder to see a man's judgment so easily, and often so egregiously misled, by abstract reasoning? need we wonder at the success of any theorist, who has a tolerable command of language, and a moderate share of cunning, pro-



vided his system be well-timed, and adapted to the manners and principles of his age? Neither need we wonder to see the grossest and most detestable absurdities recommended by singular plausibility of argument, and such as may for a time impose even on the intelligent and sagacious; till at last, when the author's design becomes manifest, common sense begins to operate, and men have recourse to their instinctive and intuitive sentiments, as the most effectual security against the assaults of the logician.

Further, previous to all influence from habit and education, the intellectual abilities of different men are very different in respect of reasoning, as well as of common sense. Some men, sagacious enough in perceiving truth, are but ill qualified to reason about it: while others, not superior in common sense, or intuitive sagacity, are much more dexterous in devising and confuting arguments. If you propose a sophism to the latter, you are at once contradicted and confuted: the former, though they cannot confute you, are perhaps equally sensible of your false doctrine, and unfair reasoning; they know, that what you say is not true, though they cannot tell in what respect it is false. Perhaps all that is wanting to enable them to confute, as well as contradict, is only a little practice in speaking and wrangling: but surely this affects not the truth or falsehood of propositions. What is false is as really so to the person who perceives its falsity, without being able to prove it, as to him who both perceives and proves; and it is equally false, before I learn logic, and after.—Is it not therefore highly unreasonable to expect conviction from every antagonist who cannot confute you, and to ascribe, to prejudice what is owing to the irresistible impulse of unerring nature?

I have conversed with many people of sense on the subject of this controversy concerning liberty and necessity. To the greater part, the arguments of Clarke and others, in vindication of liberty, seemed quite satisfying; others owned themselves puzzled with the subtleties of those who took the opposite side of the question; some reposed with full assurance on that consciousness of liberty which every man feels in his own breast: in a word, as far as my experience goes, I have found all the impartial, the most sagacious, and most virtuous, part of mankind, enemies to fatality in their hearts; willing to consider the arguments for it as rather specious than solid; and disposed to receive, with joy and thankfulness, a thorough vindication of human liberty, and a logical confutation of the opposite doctrine.

3. It has been said, that philosophers are answerable, not for the consequences, but only for the truth of their tenets; and that, if a doctrine be true, its being attended with disagreeable consequences will not render it false. We readily acquiesce in this remark; but we imagine it cannot be meant of any truth but what is certain and incontrovertible. No genuine truth did ever of itself produce effects inconsistent with real utility\*. But many principles pass for truth, which are far from deserving that honourable appellation. Some give it to all doctrines which have been defended with subtlety, and which, whether seriously believed or not, have never been logically confuted. But to affirm, that all such doctrines are certainly true, would argue the most contemptible ignorance of human language, and human nature. It is there-

\* Ζητω την αληθειαν, ὅφ' ἡς εἴδεις πωποῖε ἐβλαβη.

Marc. Antonin.



fore absurd to say, that the bad consequences of admitting such doctrines ought not to be urged as arguments against them.—Now, there are many persons in the world, of most respectable understanding, who would be extremely averse to acknowledge, that the doctrine of necessity has ever been demonstrated beyond all possibility of doubt. I may therefore be permitted to consider it as a controvertible tenet, and to expose the absurdities and dangerous consequences with which the belief of it may, and must be attended.

Mr. Hume endeavours to raise a prejudice against this method of refutation. He probably foresaw, that the tendency of his principles would be urged as an argument against them; and being somewhat apprehensive of the consequences, as well he might, he insinuates, that all such reasoning is no better than personal invective. “There is no method of reasoning,” says he, “more common, and yet none more blameable, than in philosophical debates to endeavour the refutation of any hypothesis, by a pretence of its dangerous consequences to religion and morality. When any opinion leads into absurdities, it is certainly false; but it is not certain that an opinion is false, because it is of dangerous consequence. Such topics therefore ought entirely to be forborne, as serving nothing to the discovery of truth, but only to make the person of an antagonist odious\*.” If your philosophy be such, that its consequences cannot be unfolded without rendering your person odious, pray, Mr. Hume, who is to blame? you, who contrive and publish it; or I, who criticise it? There is a kind of philosophy so salutary in its effects, as to endear the person of the author to every good man: why is not yours of this kind? If it is not,

\*Essay on Liberty and Necessity, part 2.

as you yourself seem to apprehend, do you think, that I ought to applaud your principles, or suffer them to pass unexamined, even though I am certain of their pernicious tendency? or that, out of respect to your person, I ought not to put others on their guard against them? Surely you cannot be so blinded by self-admiration, as to think it the duty of any man to sacrifice the interest of mankind to your interest, or rather to your reputation as a metaphysical writer. If you do think so, I must take the liberty to differ from your judgment in this, as in many other matters.

Nor can I agree to what our author says of this method of reasoning, that it tends nothing to the discovery of truth. Does not every thing tend to the discovery of truth, that disposes men to think for themselves, and to consider opinions with attention, before they adopt them? And have not many well meaning persons rashly adopted a plausible opinion on the supposition of its being harmless, who, if they had been aware of its bad tendency, would have proceeded with more caution, and made a better use of their understanding?

This is truly a notable expedient for determining controversy in favour of licentious theories. An author publishes a book, in which are many doctrines fatal to human happiness, and subversive of human society. If, from a regard to truth, and to mankind, we endeavour to expose them in their proper colours, and, by displaying their dangerous and absurd consequences, to deter men from rashly adopting them without examination; our adversary immediately exclaims, "This is not fair reasoning; this is personal invective." Were the sentiments of the public to be regulated by this exclamation, licentious writers might do what mischief they pleased, and no man durst appear in opposition, without being hooted at for his want of



breeding.—It is happy for us all, that the law is not to be browbeaten by insinuations of this kind; otherwise we should hear some folks exclaim against it every day, as one of the most ungenteel things in the world. And truly they would have reason: for it cannot be denied, that an indictment at the Old Bailey has much the air of a personal invective; and banishment, or burning in the hand, amounts nearly to a personal assault; nay, both have often this express end, to make the person of the criminal odious: and yet in his judgment perhaps, there was no great harm in picking a pocket of a handkerchief, value thirteen pence, provided it was done with a good grace. Let not the majesty of science be offended by this allusion; I mean not to argue from it, for it is not quite similar to the case in hand. That those men act the part of good citizens, who endeavour to overturn the plainest principles of human knowledge, and to subvert the foundations of all religion, I am far from thinking; but I should be extremely sorry to see any other weapons employed against them than those of reason and ridicule, chastised by decency and truth. Other weapons this cause requires not; nay, in this cause, all other weapons would do more harm than good. And let it still be remembered, that the object of our strictures is not men, but books; and that these incur our censure, not because they bear certain names, but because they contain certain principles.

These remarks relate rather to the doctrines of scepticism in general, than to this of necessity in particular; which I am not ignorant that many men, respectable both for their talents and principles, have asserted. I presume, however, they would have been more cautious if they had attended to the consequences that may be drawn from it.—To which I now return.

Some of the Fatalists are willing to reconcile their system with our natural notions of moral good and evil; but all they have been able to do is, to remove the difficulty a step or two further off. But the most considerable of that party are not solicitous to render these points consistent. If they can only establish necessity, they leave natural religion to shift for itself. Mr. Hume in particular affirms, that on his principles it is impossible for natural reason to vindicate the character of the Deity\*. Had this author been possessed of one grain of that modesty which he recommends in the conclusion of his essay; had he thought it worth his while to sacrifice a little pittance of ignominious applause to the happiness of human kind; he would have shuddered at the thought of inculcating a doctrine which he knew to be irreconcilable with this great first principle of religion; and of which, therefore, he must have known, that it tended to overturn the only durable foundation of human society and human happiness.

The advocates for liberty, on the other hand, have universally espoused the cause of virtue, and zealously asserted the infinite wisdom and purity of the divine nature. Now, I confess, that this very consideration is, according to my notion of things, a strong argument in favour of the last mentioned doctrine. Here are two opinions; the one inconsistent with the first principles of natural religion, as some of those who maintain it acknowledge, as well as with the experience, the belief, and the practice, of the generality of rational beings; the other perfectly consistent with religion, conscience, and common sense. If the reader believe, with me, that the Deity is infinitely good and wise, he cannot balance a moment between them; nor hesitate

\* Essay on Liberty and Necessity, *sub. fin.*



to affirm, that the universal belief of the former would produce much mischief and misery to mankind. If he be prepossessed in favour of fatality, he ought, however, before he acquiesce in it as true, to be well assured, that the evidences of natural religion, particularly of the divine existence and attributes, are weaker than the proofs that have been urged in behalf of necessity. But will any one say, that this doctrine admits of a proof, as unexceptionable as that by which we evince the being and attributes of God? I appeal to his own heart, I appeal to the experience and consciousness of mankind;—are you as thoroughly convinced, that no past action of your life could possibly have been prevented, and that no future action can possibly be contingent, as that God is infinitely wise, powerful, and good?—Examine the evidence of both propositions, examine with candour the instinctive suggestions of your own mind;—and then tell me, whether you find atheism or man's moral liberty hardest to be believed.

Perhaps I shall be told, that the belief of moral liberty is attended with equal difficulties; for that, to reconcile the contingency of human actions with the prescience of God, is as impossible, as to reconcile necessity with his goodness and wisdom. Others have answered this objection at length; I make therefore only two brief remarks upon it. 1. As it implies not any reflection on the divine power, to say that it cannot perform impossibilities; so neither, I presume, does it imply any reflection on his knowledge, to say, that he cannot foresee as certain, what is really not certain, but only contingent. Yet he sees all possible effects of all possible causes; and our freedom to choose good or evil can no more be conceived to interfere with the final purposes of his providence, than our power of moving our limbs is inconsistent with our inability to remove mountains.

2. No man will take it upon him to say, that he distinctly understands the manner in which the Deity acts, perceives, and knows: but the incomprehensibleness of his nature will never induce men to doubt his existence and attributes, unless there be men who fancy themselves infallible, and of infinite capacity. Shall I then conclude, because I cannot fully comprehend the manner in which the divine prescience operates, that therefore the Deity is not infinitely perfect? or that, therefore, I cannot be certain of the truth of a sentiment which is warranted by my constant experience, and by that of all mankind? Shall I say, that because my knowledge is not infinite, therefore I have no knowledge? Because I know not when I shall die, does it follow, that I cannot be certain of my being now alive? Because God has not told me every thing, shall I refuse to believe what he has told me? To draw such a conclusion from such premises is in my judgment, as contrary to reason, as to say, that, because I am ignorant of the cause of magnetical attraction, therefore I ought not to believe that the needle points to the north.—That I am a free agent, I know and believe; that God foresees whatever can be foreseen, as he can do whatever can be done, I also know and believe: nor have the Fatalists ever proved, nor can they ever prove, that the one belief is inconsistent with the other.

The asserters of human liberty have always maintained, that to believe all actions and intentions necessary, is the same thing as to believe that man is not an accountable being, or, in other words, no moral agent. And indeed this notion is natural to every person who has the courage to trust his own experience, without seeking to puzzle plain matter of fact with verbal distinctions and metaphysical refinement. But, it is said, the sense of moral beauty and turpitude still remains with us,



even after we are convinced that all actions and intentions are necessary ; that this sense maketh us moral agents ; and therefore, that our moral agency is perfectly consistent with our necessary agency. But this is nothing to the purpose ; it is putting us off with mere words. For what is moral agency, and what is implied in it? This at least must be implied in it, that we ought to do some things, and not to do others. But if every intention and action of my life is fixed by eternal laws, which I can neither elude nor alter, it is as absurd to say to me, You ought to be honest to-morrow, as to say, You ought to stop the motion of the planets to-morrow. Unless some events depend upon my determination, *ought*, and *ought not*, have no meaning when applied to me. Moral agency further implies, that we are accountable for our conduct ; and that if we do what we ought not to do, we deserve blame and punishment. My conscience tells me, that I am accountable for those actions only that are in my own power ; and neither blames nor approves, in myself or in others, that conduct which is the effect, not of choice, but of necessity. Convince me, that all my actions are equally necessary, and you silence my conscience for ever, or at least prove it to be a fallacious and impertinent monitor : you will then convince me, that all circumspection is unnecessary, and all remorse absurd. And is it a matter of little moment, whether I believe my moral feelings authentic and true, or equivocal and fallacious? Can any principle be of more fatal consequence to me, or to society, than to believe, that the dictates of conscience are false, unreasonable, or insignificant? Yet this is one certain effect of my becoming a Fatalist, or even sceptical in regard to moral liberty.

I observe, that when a man's understanding begins to be so far perverted by debauchery, as to

make him imagine his crimes unavoidable, from that moment he begins to think them innocent, and deems it a sufficient apology, that in respect of them he is no longer a free but a necessary agent. The drunkard pleads his constitution, the blasphemer urges the invincible force of habit, and the sensualist would have us believe, that his appetites are too strong to be resisted. Suppose all men so far perverted as to argue in the same manner with regard to crimes of every kind;—then it is certain, that all men would be equally disposed to think all crimes innocent. And what would be the consequence? Licentiousness, misery, and desolation, irremediable and universal. If God intended that men should be happy, and that the human race should continue for many generations, he certainly intended also that men should believe themselves free, moral, and accountable creatures.

Supposing it possible for a man to act upon the belief of his being a necessary agent, let us see how he would behave in some of the common affairs of life. He does me an injury. I go to him and remonstrate. You will excuse me, says he; I was put upon it by one on whom I am dependent, and who threatened me with beggary and perdition if I refused to comply. I acknowledge this to be a considerable alleviation of the poor man's guilt. Next day he repeats the injury; and, on my renewing my remonstrances, Truly, says he, I was offered sixpence to do it; or I did it to please my humour: but I know you will pardon me, when I tell you, that as all motives are necessary causes of the actions that proceed from them, it follows, that all motives productive of the same action are irresistible, and therefore, in respect of the agent, equally strong: I am therefore as innocent now as I was formerly; for the event has proved, that the motive



arising from the offer of sixpence, or from the impulse of whim, was as effectual in producing the action which you call an injury, as the motive arising from the fear of ruin. Notwithstanding this fine speech, I should be afraid, that these principles, if persisted in, and acted upon, would soon bring the poor Fatalist to Tyburn or Bedlam.

Will you promise to assist me to-morrow with your labour, advice, or interest? No, says the practical Fatalist; I can promise nothing: for my conduct to-morrow will certainly be determined by the motive that then happens to predominate. Let your promise, say I, be your motive. How can you be so ignorant, he replies, as to imagine that our motives to action are in our own power! O sad, O sad! you must study metaphysic, indeed you must. Why, Sir, our motives to action are obtruded upon us by irresistible necessity. Perhaps they arise immediately from some passion, judgment, fancy, or, if you please, volition; but this volition, fancy, judgment, or passion—what is it? an effect without a cause? No, no; it is necessarily excited by some idea, object, or notion, which presents itself independently on me, and in consequence of some extrinsic cause, the operation of which I can neither foresee nor prevent.—Where is the man who would choose this Fatalist for his friend, companion, or fellow-citizen? who will say, that society could at all subsist, if the generality of mankind were to think, and speak, and act upon such principles?

But, says the Fatalist, is it not easy to imagine cases in which the men who believe themselves free, would act the part of fools or knaves? Nothing indeed is more easy. But let it be observed, that the folly or knavery of such men, arises, not from their persuasion of their own free agency, for many millions of this persuasion have passed through life with a fair character, but from other causes. I can-

not conceive any greater discouragement from knavery and folly, than the consideration that man is an accountable being; and I know not how we can suppose him accountable, unless we suppose him free. The obvious tendency of our principles is therefore to deter men from knavery and folly; whereas it is impossible for a Fatalist to act upon his own principles for one day, without rendering himself ridiculous or detestable.

The reader, if disposed to pursue these hints, and attend, in imagination, to the behaviour of the practical Fatalist in the more interesting scenes of public and private life, may entertain himself with a series of adventures, more ludicrous, or at least more irrational, than any of those for which the knight of La Mancha is celebrated. I presume I have said enough to satisfy every impartial mind, "That the real and general belief of necessity would be attended with fatal consequences to science, and to human nature;"—which is a repetition of the third remark we formerly made on the doctrine of the non-existence of body\*.

And now we have proved, that if there was any reason for rejecting Berkeley's doctrine as absurd, and contrary to common sense, before his arguments were shewn to arise from the abuse of words, there is at present the same reason for rejecting the doctrine of necessity, even on the supposition that it hath not as yet been logically confuted. Both doctrines are repugnant to the general belief of mankind: both notwithstanding all the efforts of the subtlest sophistry, are still incredible: both are so contrary to nature, and to the condition of human beings, that they cannot be carried into practice; and so contrary to true philosophy, that they cannot be admitted into science, without bringing

\* See the end of the preceding section.



scepticism along with them, and rendering questionable the plainest principles of moral truth, and the very distinction between truth and falsehood. In a word, we have proved, that common sense, as it teacheth us to believe and be assured of the existence of matter, doth also teach us to believe and be assured, that man is a free agent.

It would lead us too far from our present purpose to enter upon a logical examination of the argument for necessity. Our design is only to explain by what marks one may distinguish the principles of common sense, that is, intuitive, or self-evident notions, from those deceitful and inveterate opinions that have sometimes assumed the same appearance. If I have satisfied the reader, that the free agency of men is a self-evident fact, I have also satisfied him, that all reasoning on the side of necessity, though accounted unanswerable, is in its very nature, and previously to all confutation, absurd and irrational, and contrary to the practice and principles of all true philosophers.

Let not the friends of liberty be discouraged by the perplexing arguments of the Fatalist\*. Arguments in opposition to self-evident truth, must, if plausible, be perplexing. Think what method of argumentation a man must pursue, who sets him-

\* There is no subject on which doubts and difficulties may not be started by ingenious and disputatious men: and therefore, from the number of their objections, and the length of the controversy to which they give occasion, we cannot, in any case, conclude, that the original evidence is weak, or even that it is not obvious and striking. Were we to presume, that every principle is dubious against which specious objections may be contrived, we should be quickly led into universal scepticism. The two ways in which the ingenuity of speculative men has been most commonly employed, are dogmatical assertions of doubtful opinions, and subtle cavils against certain truths.

*Gerard's Dissertations, ii. 4.*



self to confute any axiom in geometry, or to argue against the existence of a sentiment, acknowledged and felt by all mankind. Indeed I cannot see how such a person should ever impose upon people of sense, except by availing himself of expressions, which either are in themselves ambiguous, or become so by his manner of applying them. If the ambiguity be discernible, the argument can have no force; if there be no suspicion of ambiguity, the dispute may be continued from generation to generation, without working any change in the sentiments of either party. When fact is disregarded, when intuition goes for nothing, when no standard of truth is acknowledged, and every unanswered argument is deemed unanswerable, true reasoning is at an end; and the disputant, having long ago lost sight of common sense, is so far from regaining the path of truth, that, like Thompson's peasant bewildered in the snow, he continues "to wander on still more and more astray." If any person will give himself the trouble to examine the whole controversy concerning liberty and necessity, he will find, that the arguments on both sides come at last to appear unanswerable:—there is no common principle acknowledged by both parties, to which an appeal can be made, and each party charges the other with begging the question. Is it not then better to rest satisfied with the simple feeling of the understanding? I feel that it is in my power to will or not to will: all you can say about the influence of motives will never convince me of the contrary; or if I should say that I am convinced by your arguments, my conduct must continually bely my profession. One thing is undeniable: your words are obscure, my feeling is not;—this is universally attended to, acknowledged and acted upon; those to the majority of mankind would.



be unintelligible, nay, perhaps they are in a great measure so even to yourselves.

### CHAP. III.

#### *Recapitulation and Inference.*

THE substance of the preceding illustrations, when applied to the principal purpose of this discourse, is as followeth:

Although it be certain, that all just reasoning does ultimately terminate in the principles of common sense; that is, in principles which must be admitted as certain, or as probable, upon their own authority, without evidence, or at least without proof; even as all mathematical reasoning does ultimately terminate in self-evident axioms: yet philosophers, especially those who have applied themselves to the investigation of the laws of human nature, have not always been careful to confine the reasoning faculty within its proper sphere, but have vainly imagined, that even the principles of common sense are subject to the cognisance of reason, and may be either confirmed or confuted by argument. They have accordingly, in many instances, carried their investigations higher than the ultimate and self-supported principles of common sense; and by so doing have introduced many errors, and much false reasoning, into the moral sciences. To remedy this, it was proposed, as a matter deserving serious attention, to ascertain the separate provinces of reason and common sense. And because, in many cases, it may be difficult to distinguish a principle of common sense from an acquired prejudice; and, consequently, to know at what point reasoning ought to stop, and the authority of common sense to be admitted as deci-

sive; it was therefore judged expedient to inquire, “Whether such reasonings as have been prosecuted beyond ultimate principles, be not marked with some peculiar characters, by which they may be distinguished from legitimate investigation.” To illustrate this point, the doctrines of *the non-existence of matter*, and *the necessity of human actions*, were pitched upon as examples; in which, at least in the former of which, common sense, in the opinion of all competent judges, is confessedly violated;—the natural effects produced upon the mind by the reasonings that have been urged in favour of these doctrines, were considered;—and the consequences, resulting from the admission of such reasonings, were taken notice of, and explained. And it was found, that the reasonings that have been urged in favour of these doctrines, are really marked with some peculiar characters, which it is presumed, can belong to no legitimate argumentation whatsoever. Of these reasonings it was observed, and proved, “That the doctrines they are intended to establish are contradictory to the general belief of all men in all ages;—That, though enforced and supported with singular subtlety, and though admitted by some professed philosophers, they do not produce that conviction which sound reasoning never fails to produce in the intelligent mind;—and, lastly, That really to believe, and to act from a real belief of such doctrines and reasonings, must be attended with fatal consequences to science, to virtue, to human society, and to all the important interests of mankind.”

I do not suppose, that all the errors which have arisen from not attending to the foundation of truth, and essential rules of reasoning, as here explained, are equally dangerous. Some of them perhaps may be innocent; to such the last of these characters cannot belong. If wholly innocent, it is



of little consequence, whether we know them to be errors or not. When a new tenet is advanced in moral science, there will be a strong presumption against it, if contrary to universal opinion: for as every man may find the evidence of moral science in his own breast, it is not to be supposed, that the generality of mankind would, for any length of time, persist in an error, which their own daily experience, if attended to without prejudice, could not fail to rectify. Let, therefore, the evidence of the new tenet be carefully examined, and attended to. If it produce a full and clear conviction in the intelligent mind, and at the same time serve to explain the causes of the universality and long continuance of the old erroneous opinion, the new one ought certainly to be received as true. But if the assent produced by the new doctrine be vague, indefinite and unsatisfying; if nature and common sense reclaim against it; if it recommend modes of thought that are inconceivable, or modes of action that are impracticable: it is not, it cannot be true, however plausible its evidences may appear.

Some will think, perhaps, that a straighter and shorter course might have brought me sooner, and with equal security, to this conclusion. I acknowledge I have taken a pretty wide circuit. This was owing in part to my love of perspicuity, which in these subjects hath not always been studied so much as it ought to have been; and partly, and chiefly, to my desire of confuting, on this occasion, (as I wish to have done with metaphysical controversy for ever), as many of the most pernicious tenets of modern scepticism as could be brought within my present plan. But the reader will perceive, that I have endeavoured to conduct all my digressions in such a manner, as that they might serve for illustrations of the principal subject.

To teach men to distinguish by intuition a dictate of common sense from an acquired prejudice, is a work which nature only can accomplish. We shall ever be more or less sagacious in this respect, according as Heaven has endowed us with greater or less strength of mind, vivacity of perception, and solidity of judgment. The method here recommended is more laborious, and much less expeditious. Yet this method, if I am not greatly mistaken, may be of considerable use, to enable us to form a proper estimate of those reasonings, which, by violating common sense, tend to subvert every principle of rational belief, to sap the foundations of truth and science, and to leave the mind exposed to all the horrors of scepticism. To be puzzled by such reasonings, is neither a crime nor a dishonour; though in many cases it may be both dishonourable and criminal to suffer ourselves to be deluded by them. For is not this to prefer the equivocal voice of a vain, selfish, and ensnaring wrangler, to the clear, the benevolent, the infallible dictates of nature? Is not this to bely our sentiments, to violate our constitution, to sin against our own soul? Is not this “to forsake the fountains of living water, and to hew out unto ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water?”

### PART III.

#### OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

THEY who consider virtue as a subject of mere curiosity, and think that the principles of morals and properties of conic sections ought to be explained with the same degree of apathy and indifference, will find abundant matter for censure in the preceding observations. As the author is not



very ambitious of the good opinion of such theorists, he will not give himself much trouble in multiplying apologies for what, to them, may have the appearance of keenness or severity in the animadversions he has hitherto made, or may hereafter make, on the principles of certain noted philosophers. He considers happiness as the end and aim of our being; and he thinks philosophy valuable only so far as it may be conducive to this end. Human happiness seemeth to him wholly unattainable, except by the means that virtue and religion provide. He is therefore persuaded, that while employed in pleading the cause of virtue, and of true science, its best auxiliary, he supports, in some measure, the character of a friend to human kind; and he would think his right to that glorious appellation extremely questionable, if the warmth of his zeal did not bear some proportion to the importance of his cause. However suspicious he may be of his ability to vindicate the rights of his fellow creatures, he is not suspicious of his inclination. He feels that, on such a subject, he must speak from the heart, or not speak at all.—For the genius and manner of his discourse he has no other apology to offer: and by every person of spirit, candour, and benevolence, he is sure that this apology will be deemed sufficient.

As to the principles and matter of it, he is less confident. These, though neither visionary nor unimportant, may possibly be misunderstood. He therefore begs leave to urge a few things, for the further vindication and illustration of them. To his own mind they are fully satisfactory; he hopes to render them equally so to every candid reader. Happy! if he should be as successful in establishing conviction, as others have been in subverting it.

## CHAP. I.

*Further remarks on the consistency of these principles with the interests of Science, and the Rights of mankind.*

IT may possibly be objected to this discourse, That "it tends to discourage freedom of inquiry, and to promote implicit faith."

But nothing is more contrary to my design; as those who attend, without prejudice, to the full import of what I have advanced on the subject of evidence, will undoubtedly perceive. Let me be permitted to repeat, that the truths in which man is most concerned, do not lie exceedingly deep; nor are we to estimate either their importance, or their certainty, by the length of the line of our investigation. The evidences of the philosophy of human nature are found in our own breast; we need not roam abroad in quest of them; the unlearned are judges of them as well as the learned. Ambiguities have arisen, when the feelings of the heart and understanding were expressed in words; but the feelings themselves were not ambiguous. Let a man attentively examine himself, with a sincere purpose of discovering the truth, and without any bias in favour of particular theories, and he will seldom be at a loss in regard to those truths, at least, that are most essential to his happiness and duty. If men must needs amuse themselves with metaphysical investigation, let them apply it, where it can do no harm, to the distinctions and logomachies of ontology. In the science of human nature it cannot possibly do good, but must of necessity do infinite mischief. What avail the obscure deductions of verbal argument, in illustrating what we sufficiently know by experience? or in shewing



that to be fictitious and false, whose energy we must feel and acknowledge every moment? When therefore I find a pretended principle of human nature evinced by a dark and intricate investigation, I am tempted to suspect, not without reason, that its evidence is no where to be found but in the arguments of the theorist; and these, when disguised by quaint distinctions, and ambiguous language, it is sometimes hard to confute, even when the heart recoils from the doctrine with contempt or detestation. If the doctrine be true, it must also be agreeable to experience: to experience, therefore, let the appeal be made; let the circumstances be pointed out, in which the controverted sentiment arises, or is supposed to arise. This is to act the philosopher, not the metaphysician; the interpreter of nature, not the builder of systems. But let us consider the objection more particularly.

What then do you mean by that implicit faith, to which you suppose these principles too favourable? Do you mean an acquiescence in the dictates of our own understanding, or in those of others? If the former, I must tell you, that such implicit faith is the only kind of belief which true philosophy recommends. I have already remarked, that, while man continues in his present state, our own intellectual feelings are, and must be, the standard of truth to us. All evidence productive of belief, is resolvable into the evidence of consciousness; and comes at last to this point, I believe because I believe, or because the law of my nature determines me to believe. This belief may be called implicit; but it is the only rational belief of which we are capable: and to say, that our minds ought not to submit to it, is as absurd as to say, that our bodies ought not to be nourished with food. Revelation itself must be attended with evidence to satisfy consciousness or common sense;

otherwise it can never be rationally believed. By the evidence of the gospel, the rational Christian is persuaded that it comes from God. He acquiesces in it as truth, not because it is recommended by others, but because it satisfies his own understanding.

But if, by implicit faith, you mean, what I think is commonly meant by that term, an unwarrantable or unquestioned acquiescence in the sentiments of other men, I deny that any part of this discourse hath a tendency to promote it. I never said, that doctrines are to be taken for granted without examination; though I affirmed, that, in regard to moral doctrines, a long and intricate examination is neither necessary nor expedient. With moral truth, it is the business of every man to be acquainted; and therefore the Deity has made it level to every capacity.

Far be it from a lover of truth to discourage freedom of inquiry! Man is possessed of reasoning powers; by means of which we may bring that within the sphere of common sense, which was originally beyond it. Of these powers he may, and ought to avail himself; for many important truths are not self-evident, and our faculties were not designed for a state of inactivity. But neither were they designed to be employed in fruitless or dangerous investigation. Our knowledge and capacity are limited; it is fit and necessary they should be so: we need not wander into forbidden paths, or attempt to penetrate inaccessible regions, in quest of employment; the cultivation of useful and practical science; the improvement of arts, and the indispensable duties of life, will furnish ample scope to all the exertions of human genius. Surely that man is my friend, who dissuades me from attempting what I cannot perform, nor even attempt with-



out danger. And is not he a friend to science and mankind, who endeavours to discourage fallacious and unprofitable speculation, and to propose a criterion by which it may be known and avoided?

But if reasoning ought not to be carried beyond a certain boundary, and if it is the authority of common sense that fixeth this boundary, and if it be possible to mistake a prejudice for a principle of common sense, how (it may be said) are prejudices to be detected? At this rate, a man has nothing to do, but to call his prejudice a dictate of common sense, and then it is established in perfect security, beyond the reach of argument. Does not this furnish a pretence for limiting the freedom of inquiry?—Having already said a great deal in answer to the first part of this question, I need not now say much in answer to the last. I shall only ask, on the other hand, what method of reasoning is the properest for overcoming the prejudices of an obstinate man? Are we to wrangle with him *in infinitum*, without ever arriving at any fixed principle? That surely is not the way to illustrate truth, or rectify error. Do we mean to ascertain the importance of our arguments by their number, and to pronounce that the better cause whose champion gives the last word? This, I fear, would not mend the matter. Suppose our antagonist should deny a self-evident truth, or refuse his assent to an intuitive probability; must we not refer him to the common sense of mankind? If we do not, we must either hold our peace, or have recourse to sophistry: for when a principle comes to be intuitively true or false, all legitimate reasoning is at an end, and all further reasoning impertinent. To the common sense of mankind we must therefore refer him sooner or later; and if he continue obstinate, we must leave him. Is it not then of consequence to truth, and may it not serve to prevent many a sophistical

argument, and unprofitable logomachy, that we have it continually in view, that common sense is the standard of truth? a maxim, which men are not always disposed to admit in its full latitude, and which, in the heat and hurry of dispute, they are apt to overlook altogether. Some men will always be found, who think the most absurd prejudices founded in common sense. Reasonable men never scruple to submit their prejudices or principles to examination: but if that examination turn to no account, or if it turn to a bad account; if it only puzzle where it ought to convince, and darken what it ought to illustrate; if it recommend impracticable modes of action, or inconceivable modes of thought;—I must confess I cannot perceive the use of it. This is the only kind of reasoning that I mean to discourage. It is this kind of reasoning that has proved so fatal to the abstract sciences. In it all our sceptical systems are founded; of it they consist; and by it they are supported. Till the abstract sciences be cleared of this kind of reasoning, they deserve not the name of philosophy: they may amuse a weak and turbulent mind, and render it still weaker and more turbulent; but they cannot convey any real instruction: they may undermine the foundations of virtue and science; but they cannot illustrate a single truth, nor establish one principle of importance, nor improve the mind of man in any respect whatsoever.

By some it may be thought an objection to the principles of this essay, "That they seem to recommend a method of confutation which is not strictly according to logic, and do actually contradict some of the established laws of that science."

It will readily be acknowledged, that many of the maxims of the school-logic are founded in truth and nature, and have so long obtained universal approbation, that they are now become proverbial



in philosophy. Many of its rules and distinctions are extremely useful, not so much for strengthening the judgment, as for enabling the disputant quickly to comprehend, and perspicuously to express, in what the force or fallacy of an argument consists. The ground work of this science, the *Logic of Aristotle*, if we may judge of the whole by the part now extant, is one of the most successful and most extraordinary effects of philosophic genius that ever appeared in the world. And yet, if we consider this science, with regard to its design and consequences, we shall perhaps see reason to think, that a strict observance of its laws is not always necessary to the discovery of truth.

It was originally intended as a help to discourse among a talkative and sprightly people. The constitution of Athens made public speaking of great importance, and almost a certain road to preferment or distinction. This was also in some measure the case at Rome; but the Romans were more reserved, and did not, till about the time of Cicero, think of reducing conversation or public speaking to rule. The vivacity of the Athenians, encouraged by their democratical spirit, made them fond of disputes and declamations, which were often carried on without any view to discover truth, but merely to gratify humour, give employment to the tongue, and amuse a vacant hour. Some of the dialogues of Plato are to be considered in this light, rather as exercises in declamation, than serious disquisitions in philosophy. It is true, this is not the only merit even of such of them as seem the least considerable. If we are often dissatisfied with his doctrine; if we have little curiosity to learn the characters and manners of that age, whereof he has given so natural a representation; we must yet acknowledge, that as models for elegance and simplicity of composition, the most inconsiderable of



Plato's dialogues are very useful and ingenious. His speakers often compliment each other on the beauty of their style, even when there is nothing very striking in the sentiment\*. If therefore, we would form a just estimate of Plato, we must regard him not only as a philosopher, but also as a rhetorician; for it was evident he was ambitious to excel in both characters. But it appears, not to have been his opinion, that the practice of extemporary speaking and disputing, so frequent in his time, had any direct tendency to promote the investigation of truth, or the acquisition of wisdom. The Lacedemonians, the most reserved and most silent people in Greece, and who made the least pretensions to a literary character, were, in his judgment, a nation not only of the wisest men, but of the greatest philosophers. Their words were few, their address not without rusticity; but the meanest of them was able, by a single expression, dexterously aimed, and seasonably introduced, to make the stranger with whom he conversed, appear no wiser than a child†.

The Athenians, accustomed to reduce every thing to art, and among whom the spirit of science was more prevalent than in any other nation ancient or modern, had contrived a kind of technical logic long before the days of Aristotle. Their sophists taught it in conjunction with rhetoric and philosophy. But Aristotle brought it to perfection, and

\* See the Symposium. Platonis opera, vol. 3. p. 198. Edit. Serran.

† Εἰ τις ἐθελοῖ Λακεδαιμονίων τῷ φαυλοτάτῳ συγγενεσθαι, τὰ μὲν πολλὰ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις εὐρησεῖ αὐτὸν φαῦλον τινὰ φαινόμενον, ὥπειτα οὕτως ἂν τύχοι τῶν λεγομένων, ἐνεβαλεῖ ῥῆμα ἀξίον λόγου βραχὺ καὶ συνεστραμμένον, ὥσπερ δεινὸς ἀκοντιστῆς ὥς φαινεσθαι τὸν προσδιαλεγόμενον παῖδος μῆδεν βέλτιον.

Socrates in Plat. Protagora, vol. 1. p. 342.



seems to have been the first who professedly disjoined it from the other arts and sciences. On his logic was founded that of the school-men. But they, like other commentators, often misunderstood the text, and often perverted it to the purpose of a favourite system. They differed from one another in their notions of Aristotle's doctrine, ranged themselves into sects and parties; and instead of explaining the principles of their master, made it their sole business to comment upon one another. Now and then men of learning arose, who endeavoured to revive the true Peripatetic philosophy; but their efforts, instead of proving successful, served only to provoke persecution; and at length the scholastic system grew so corrupt, and at the same time so enormous in magnitude, that it became an insuperable incumbrance to the understanding, and contributed not a little to perpetuate the ignorance and barbarism of those times. The chief aim of the old logic, even in its purest form, (so far at least as it was a practical science), was to render men expert in arguing readily on either side of any question. But it is one thing to employ our faculties in searching after truth, and a very different thing to employ them equally in defence of truth and of error; and the same modification of intellect that fits a man for the one, will by no means qualify him for the other. Nay, if I mistake not, the talents that fit us for discovering truth, are rather hurt than improved by the practice of sophistry. To argue against one's own conviction, must always have a bad effect on the heart, and render one more indifferent about the truth, and perhaps more incapable of perceiving it\*.

See the story of Pertinax in the Rambler, No. 95; where the effects of habitual disputation, in perverting the judgment, and vitiating the heart, are illustrated with the utmost energy and elegance.

To dispute readily on either side of any question, is admired by some as a very high accomplishment: but it is what any person of moderate abilities may easily acquire by a little practice. Perhaps moderate abilities are the most favourable to the acquisition of this talent. Sensibility and penetration, the inseparable attendants, or rather the most essential parts of true genius, qualify a man for discovering truth with little labour of investigation; and at the same time interest him so deeply in it, that he cannot bear to turn his view to the other side of the question. Thus he never employs himself in devising arguments; and therefore seldom arrives at any proficiency in that exercise. But the man of slow intellect and dull imagination advances step by step in his inquiries, without any keenness of sentiment, or ardor of fancy, to distract his attention; and without that instantaneous anticipation of consequences, that leads the man of genius to the conclusion, even before he has examined all the intermediate relations. Hence he naturally acquires a talent for minute observation, and for a patient examination of circumstances; at the same time that his insensibility prevents his interesting himself warmly on either side, and leaves him leisure to attend equally to his own arguments, and to those of the antagonist. This gives him eminent superiority in a dispute, and fits him, not indeed for discovering truth, but for baffling an adversary and supporting a system.

I have been told that Newton, the first time he read Euclid's Elements, perceived instantly, and almost intuitively, the truth of the several propositions, before he consulted the proof. Such vivacity and strength of judgment are extraordinary: and indeed, in the case of mathematical and physical truths, we are seldom to expect this instantaneous anticipation of consequences, even from men of



more than moderate talents. But in moral subjects, and in most of the matters that are debated in conversation, there is rarely any need of comparing a great number of intermediate relations : every person of sound judgment sees the truth at once : or, if he does not, it is owing to his ignorance of some facts or circumstances, which may be soon learned from a plain narrative, but which are disguised and confounded more and more by wrangling and contradiction. If there be no means of clearing the disputed facts or difficulties, it would not, I presume, be imprudent to drop the subject, and talk of something else.

It is pleasant enough to hear the habitual wrangler endeavouring to justify his conduct by a pretence of zeal for the truth. It is not the love of truth, but of victory, that engages him in disputation. I have witnessed many contests of this kind ; but have seldom seen them lead, or even tend to any useful discovery. Where ostentation, self-conceit, or love of paradox, are not concerned, they commonly arise from some verbal ambiguity, or from the misconception of some fact, which both parties taking it for granted that they perfectly understand, are at no pains to ascertain : and, when once begun, are, by the vanity or obstinacy of the speakers, or perhaps by their mere love of speaking, continued, till accident put an end to them by silencing the parties, rather than reconciling their opinions. I once saw a number of persons, neither unlearned nor ill-bred, meet together to pass a social evening. As ill-luck would have it, a dispute arose about the propriety of a certain manœuvre at quadrille, in which some of the company had been interested the night before. Two parties of disputants were immediately formed ; and the matter was warmly argued from six o'clock till midnight, when the company broke up. Being no adept in cards, I

could not enter into the merits of the cause, nor take any part in the controversy ; but I observed, that each of the speakers persisted to the last in the opinion he took up at the beginning, in which he seemed to be rather confirmed than staggered by the arguments that had been urged in opposition.—With such enormous waste of time, with such vile prostitution of reason and speech, with such wanton indifference to the pleasures of friendship, all disputes are not attended ; but most of them, if I mistake not, will be found to be equally unprofitable.

I grant, that much of our knowledge is gathered from our intercourse with one another ; but I cannot think that we are greatly indebted to the argumentative part of conversation ; and nobody will say, that the most disputatious companions are either the most agreeable or the most instructive. For my own part, I have always found those to be the most delightful and most improving conversations, in which there was the least contradiction ; every person entertaining the utmost possible respect, both for the judgment, and for the veracity of his associate ; and none assuming any of those dictatorial airs, which are so offensive to the lovers of liberty, modesty, and friendship.—If a catalogue were to be made of all the truths that have been discovered by wrangling in company, or by solemn disputations in the schools, I believe it would appear, that the contending parties might have been employed as advantageously to mankind, and much more so to themselves, in whipping a top, or brandishing a rattle.

The extravagant fondness of the Stoics for logical quibbles, is one of the most disagreeable peculiarities in the writings of that sect. Every body must have been disgusted with it in reading some passages of the conversations of Epictetus, pre-



served by Arrian; and must be satisfied, that it tended rather to weaken and bewilder, than to improve the understanding. One could hardly believe to what ridiculous excess they carried it. There was a famous problem among them called the *Pseudomenos*, which was to this purpose: "When a man says, I *lie*, does he lie, or does he not? If he lies, he speaks truth; if he speaks truth, he lies." Many were the books that their philosophers wrote, in order to solve this wonderful problem. Chrysippus favoured the world with no fewer than six; and Philetas studied himself to death in his attempts to solve it. Epictetus, whose good sense often triumphs over the extravagance of Stoicism, justly ridicules this logical phrenzy\*.

Socrates made little account of the subtleties of logic; being more solicitous to instruct others than to distinguish himself†. He inferred his doctrine from the concessions of those with whom he conversed; so that he left no room for dispute, as the adversary could not contradict him, without contradicting himself. And yet to Socrates, philosophy is perhaps more indebted than to any other person whatever.

We have therefore no reason to think, that truth is discoverable by those means only which the technical logic prescribes. Aristotle knew the theory both of sophisms and syllogisms, better than any other man; yet Aristotle himself is sometimes imposed on by sophisms of his own invention‡.

\* Arrian, lib. ii. cap. 17.

† Supra, part 2. chap. 2. sect. 1.

‡ Thus he is said to have proved the earth to be the centre of the universe, by the following sophism.—"Heavy bodies naturally tend to the centre of the universe; we know by experience, that heavy bodies tend to the centre of the earth; therefore the centre of the earth is the same with that of the universe."—Which is what the logicians call *petitio principii*, or *begging the question*.

And it is remarkable, that his moral, rhetorical, and political writings, in which his own excellent judgment is little warped by logical subtleties, are far the most useful, and, in point of sound reasoning, the most unexceptionable part of his philosophy.

The apparent tendency of the school-logic is, to render men disputatious and sceptical, adepts in the knowledge of words, but inattentive to fact and experience. It makes them fonder of speaking than thinking, and therefore strangers to themselves; solicitous chiefly about rules, names, and distinctions, and therefore leaves them neither leisure nor inclination for the study of life and manners. In a word, it makes them more ambitious to distinguish themselves as the partizans of a dogmatist, than as inquirers after truth. It is easy to see how far a man of this temper is qualified to make discoveries in knowledge. To such a man, indeed, the name of truth is only a pretence: he neither is, nor can be, much interested in the solidity or importance of his tenets; it is enough if he can render them plausible; nay, it is enough if he can silence his adversary by any means. The captious turn of an habitual wrangler, deadens the understanding, sours the temper, and hardens the heart: by rendering the mind suspicious, and attentive to trifles, it weakens the sagacity of instinct, and extinguishes the fire of imagination; it transforms conversation into a state of warfare, and restrains those lively sallies of fancy, so effectual in promoting good humour and good-will, which, though often erroneous, are a thousand times more valuable than the dull correctness of a mood-and-figure disciplinarian.

One of the first maxims of the school-logic is, That nothing is to be believed, but what we can give a reason for believing; a maxim destructive



of all truth and science, as hath been fully shown in the former part of this discourse. We must not, however, lay this maxim to the charge of the ancient logic. Des Cartes, and the modern sceptics, got it from the schoolmen, who forged it out of some passages of Aristotle misunderstood. The philosopher said indeed, that all investigation should begin with doubt; but this doubt is to remain only till the understanding be convinced; which, in Aristotle's judgment, may be effected by intuitive evidence as well as by argumentative. The doctrine we have been endeavouring to illustrate, tends not to encourage any prejudices, or any opinions, unfriendly to truth or virtue: its only aim is, to establish the authority of those instinctive principles of conviction and assent, which the rational part of mankind have acknowledged in all ages, and which the condition of man, in respect both of action and intelligence, renders it absurd not to acknowledge.—We cannot suppose, that the human mind, unlike to all other natural systems, is made up of incompatible principles; in it, as in all the rest, there must be unity of design; and therefore the principles of human belief, and of human action, must have one and the same tendency. But many of our modern philosophers teach a different doctrine; endeavouring to persuade themselves, and others, that they ought not to believe what they cannot possibly disbelieve; and that those actions may be absurd, and contrary to truth, the performance of which is necessary to our very existence. If they will have it, that this is philosophy, I shall not dispute about the word; but I insist on it, that all such philosophy is no better than pedantic nonsense; and that, if a man were to write a book, to prove, that fire is the element in which we ought to live, he would not act more absurdly, than some metaphysicians of these times would be thought to

have acted, if their works were understood, and rated according to their intrinsic merit.

That every thing may be made matter of dispute, is another favourite maxim of the school-logic; and it would not be easy to devise one more detrimental to true science. What a strange propensity these doctors have had to disputation! One would think, that, in their judgment, "the chief end of man is, to contradict his neighbour, and wrangle with him for ever." To attempt a proof of what I know to be false, and a confutation of what I know to be true, is an exercise from which I can never expect advantage, so long as I deem rationality a blessing. I never heard it prescribed as a recipe for strengthening the sight, to keep constantly blindfolded in the day-time, and put on spectacles when we go to sleep; nor can I imagine how the ear of a musician could be improved, by his playing frequently on an ill-tuned fiddle. And yet the school-men seem to have thought, that the more we shut our eyes against the truth, we shall the more distinctly perceive it; and that the oftener we practise falsehood, we shall be the more sagacious in detecting, and the more hearty in abhorring it. To suppose, that we may make every thing matter of dispute, is to suppose, that we can account for every thing. Alas! in most cases, to feel and believe, is all we have to do, or can do. Destined for action rather than for knowledge, and governed more by instinct than by reason, we can extend our investigations, especially with regard to ourselves, but a very little way. And, after all, when we acquiesce with implicit confidence in the dictates of our nature, where is the harm or the danger of such a conduct? Is our life shortened, or health injured by it? No. Are our judgments perverted, or our hearts corrupted?



No. Is our happiness impaired, or the sphere of our gratification contracted? Quite the contrary. Have we less leisure for attending to the duties of life, and for adorning our minds with useful and elegant literature? We have evidently more time left for those purposes. Why then so much logic? so many disputes, and so many theories, about the first philosophy? Rather than in disguising falsehood, and labouring to subvert the foundations of truth, why do we not, with humility and candour, employ our faculties in the attainment of plain, practical, and useful knowledge?

The consequences of submitting every sentiment and principle to the test of reasoning, have been considered already. This practice has, in every age, tended much to confound science, to prevent the detection of error, and (may we not add?) to debase the human understanding. For, have we not seen real genius, under the influence of a disputatious spirit, derived from nature, fashion, or education, evaporate in subtlety, sophistry, and vain refinement? Lucretius, Cicero, and Des Cartes, might be mentioned as examples. And it will be matter of lasting regret in the republic of letters, that a greater than the greatest of these, I mean John Milton, had the misfortune to be born in an age when the study of scholastic theology was deemed an essential part of intellectual discipline.

It is either affectation or false modesty, that makes men say they know nothing with certainty. Man's knowledge, indeed, compared with that of superior beings, may be very inconsiderable; and compared with that of the Supreme, is "as nothing and vanity:" and it is true, that we are daily puzzled in attempting to account for the most familiar appearances. But it is true, notwithstanding, that we do know, and cannot possibly

doubt of our knowing, some things with certainty.  
And,

“ Let school-taught pride dissemble all it can,  
“ These little things are great to little man.”\*

To be vain of any attainment, is presumption and folly: but to think every thing disputable, is a proof of a weak mind and captious temper. And however sceptics may boast of their modesty, in disclaiming all pretensions to certain knowledge, I would appeal to the man of candour, whether they or we seem to possess least of that virtue;—they who suppose, that they can raise insurmountable objections in every subject; or we, who believe that our Maker has permitted us to know with certainty some few things?

In opposition to this practice of making every thing matter of dispute, we have endeavoured to show, that the instinctive suggestions of common sense are the ultimate standard of truth to man; that whatever contradicts them is contrary to fact, and therefore false; that to suppose them cognisable by reason, is to suppose truth as variable as the intellectual, or as the argumentative abilities of men; and that it is an abuse of reason, and tends to the subversion of science, to call in question the authenticity of our natural feelings, and of the natural suggestions of the human understanding.

That science never prospered while the old logic continued in fashion, is undeniable. Lord Verulam was one of the first who brought it into disrepute; and proposed a different method of investigating truth, namely, that the appearances of nature should be carefully observed, and instead of facts being wrested to make them fall in with theory,

\* Goldsmith's Traveller.



that theory should be cautiously inferred from facts, and from them only. The event has fully proved, that our great philosopher was in the right: for science has made more progress since his time, and by his method, than for a thousand years before. The court of Rome well knew the importance of the school-logic in supporting their authority; they knew it could be employed more successfully in distinguishing error, than in vindicating truth: and Puffendorff scruples not to affirm, that they patronised it for this very reason\*. Let it not then be urged, as an objection to this discourse, that it recommends a method of confutation which is not strictly logical. It is enough for me, that the method here recommended is agreeable to good sense and sound philosophy, and to the general notions and practices of men.

## CHAP. II.

*The subject continued. Estimate of Metaphysic, Causes of the Degeneracy of Moral Science.*

THE reader has no doubt observed, that I have frequently used the term *metaphysic*, as if it implied something worthy of contempt or censure. That no lover of science may be offended, I shall now account for this; by explaining the nature of that metaphysic which I conceive to be repugnant to true philosophy, though it has often assumed the name; and which, therefore, in my judgment, the friends of truth ought solicitously to guard against. This explanation will lead to some remarks, that may perhaps throw additional light on the present subject.

\* De Monarchia Pontificis Romani, cap. 34.

Aristotle bequeathed by legacy his writings to Theophrastus; who left them together with his own, to Neleus of Scepsis. The posterity of Neleus, being illiterate men, kept them for some time locked up; but afterwards hearing, that the king of the country was making a general search for books to furnish his library at Pergamus, they hid them in a hole under ground; where they lay for many years, and suffered much from worms and dampness. At last, however, they were sold to one Apellicon, who caused them to be copied out; and, having (according to Strabo) a greater passion for books than for knowledge, ordered the transcribers to supply the chasms from their own invention. When Sylla took Athens, he seized upon Apellicon's library, and carried it to Rome. Here the books of Aristotle were revised, by Tyrannio the grammarian, and afterwards by Andronicus of Rhodes, a Peripatetic philosopher, who published the first complete edition of them\*. To fourteen of these book, which it seems had no general title, Andronicus prefixed the words, *Ta meta ta physica*†, that is, *the books posterior to the physics*; either because, in the order of the former arrangement, they happened to be placed, or because the editor meant that they should be studied, next after the physics. This is said to be the origin of the word *Metaphysic*.

The subject of these fourteen books is miscellaneous: yet the Peripatetics seem to have considered them as constituting but one branch of science; the place of which in their system may be thus conceived. All philosophy is either speculative or practical. The practical regulates the moral and intellectual operations of men, and there-

\* Strabo, p. 609. Paris edit. 1620. Plut. Sylla.

† Τα μετα τα φυσικά.



fore comprehends ethics and logic. The speculative rests in the knowledge of truth; and is divided into three parts, to wit, Physics, which inquire into the nature of material substances, and the human soul; Mathematics, which consider certain properties of body as abstracted from body; and this Metaphysic, (which Aristotle is said to have called *Theology*, and the *First Philosophy*), which, besides some remarks on truth in general, the method of discovering it, and the errors of former philosophers, explains, first, the general properties of being, and, secondly, the nature of things separate from matter, namely, of God the one first cause, and of the forty-seven inferior deities.

Following the notion, that these fourteen books comprehend only one part of philosophy, the Christian Peripatetics divided metaphysics into universal and particular. In the first, they treated of being, and its properties and parts, considered as it is being\*; in the second, of God and angels.

The schoolmen disjoined the philosophy of the human mind from physics, where Aristotle had placed it; and added it to metaphysics, because its object is an immaterial substance. So that their metaphysics consisted of three parts: Ontology, in which they pretended to explain the general properties of being; Pneumatics, which treated of the human mind; and Natural Theology, which treated of the Supreme Being, and of those spirits which have either no body at all, or one so very fine as to be imperceptible to human sense.

From the account we have given of the manner in which Aristotle's works were first published,

\* Metaphysique universelle a laquelle il est traicté de l'estant, et des ses proprietez, et des parties ou membres de l'estant, selon qu'il est estant, &c. *Bouju.*

the reader will admit, that some of the errors to be found in them may reasonably enough be imputed to the first transcribers and editors. It was a gross error in distribution, to reduce God, and the inferior deities, who were conceived to be a particular species of beings, to the same class with those qualities or attributes that are common to all being, and to treat of both in the same part of philosophy. It was no less improper than if a physiologist should compose a treatise, "Of men, horses, and identity." This inaccuracy could not have escaped Aristotle: it is to be charged on his editors, who probably mistook a series of treatises on various subjects for one treatise on one particular subject. To many this may seem a trifling mistake; but it has produced important consequences. It led the earlier Peripatetics into the impropriety of explaining the divine existence, and the general properties of being, by the same method of reasoning; and it induced the schoolmen to confound the important sciences of pneumatics and natural theology, with the idle distinctions and logomachies of ontology. Natural theology ought to consist of legitimate inferences from the effect to the cause; pneumatics, or the philosophy of the human mind, are nothing but a detail of facts, illustrated, methodized, and applied to practice, by obvious and convincing reasonings: both sciences are founded in experience; but ontology pretends to ascertain its principles by demonstrations *a priori*. In fact, though ontology were, what it professes to be, an explication of the general properties of being, it could not throw any light on natural theology and pneumatics; for in them the ontological method of reasoning would be as improper as the mathematical. But the systems of ontology that have come into my hands, are little better than vocabularies of those hard words which the schoolmen



had contrived, in order to give an air of mystery and importance to their doctrine. While, therefore, the sciences of Natural Theology and Pneumatics were, by this preposterous division, referred to the same part of philosophy with ontology, how was it possible they could prosper, or be explained by their own proper evidence ! In fact, they did not prosper : experience, their proper evidence, was laid aside ; and fictitious theory, disguised by ontological terms and distinctions, and supported by ontological reasoning, was substituted in its stead.

Locke was one of the first who rescued the philosophy of human nature out of the hands of the schoolmen, cleared it of the enormous incumbrance of strange words which they had heaped upon it, and set the example of ascertaining our internal operations, not by theory, but by experience. His success was wonderful : for, though he has sometimes fallen into the scholastic way of arguing, as in his first book ; and sometimes suffered himself to be imposed on by words, as in his account of secondary qualities, too rashly adopted from the Cartesians ; yet has he done more to establish the abstract sciences on a proper foundation, than could have been expected from one man who derived almost all his lights from himself. His successors, Butler and Hutcheson excepted, have not been very fortunate. Berkeley's book, though written with a good design, did more harm than good, by recommending and exemplifying a method of argumentation subversive of all knowledge, and leading directly to universal scepticism. Mr. Hume's *Treatise* and *Essays* are still more exceptionable. This author has revived the scholastic way of reasoning from theory, and of wresting facts to make them coincide with it. His language is indeed more modish, but equally favourable to sophistical argument, and

equally proper for giving an air of plausibility and importance to what is frivolous or unintelligible. What regard we are to pay to his profession of arguing from experience has been already considered.

The word *metaphysics*, according to the vulgar use, is applied to all disquisitions concerning things immaterial: In this sense, the plainest account of the faculties of the mind, and of the principles of moral and natural religion, would be termed *metaphysics*. Such metaphysics, however, we are so far from despising or censuring, that we account it the sublimest and most useful part of science.

Those arguments also, and illustrations in the abstract philosophy, which are not obvious to ordinary understandings, are sometimes called *metaphysical*. But as the principles of this philosophy, however well expressed, appear somewhat abstruse to one who is but a novice in the study; and as very plain principles may seem intricate in an author who is inattentive to his expression, as the best authors sometimes are, it would be unfair to reject, or conceive a prejudice against every doctrine in morals that is not perfectly free from obscurity. Yet a continued obscurity in matters, whereof every man should be a competent judge, cannot fail to breed a suspicion, either that the doctrine is faulty, or that the writer is not equal to his subject.

The term *metaphysical*, in those passages of this book where it is expressive of censure, will be found to allude to that mode of abstract investigation, so common among the modern sceptics and the schoolmen, which is supported, either wholly by an ambiguous and indefinite phraseology, or by that in conjunction with a partial experience; and which seldom fails to lead to such conclusions as contradict matter of fact, or truths of indisputable authority. It is this mode of investigation that has introduced so many errors into the moral sciences; for



few, even of our most candid moral philosophers, are entirely free from it. The love of system, or partiality to a favourite opinion, not only puts a man off his guard, so as to make him overlook inaccurate expressions, and indefinite notions, but may sometimes occasion even a mistake of fact. When such mistakes are frequent, and affect the most important truths, we must blame the author for want of candour, or want of capacity: when they are innocent, and recur but seldom, we ought to ascribe them to the imperfection of human nature.

Instances of this metaphysic are so common, that we might almost fill a volume with a list of them. Spinoza's pretended demonstration of the existence of the one great Being, by which, however, he meant only the universe, is a metaphysical argument, founded on a series of false or unintelligible, though plausible, definitions\*. Berkeley's proof of the non-existence of matter is wholly metaphysical; and arises chiefly from the mistake of supposing certain words to have but one meaning, which really have two, and sometimes three. The same author, in a book of sermons, said to have been delivered at the chapel of Trinity College, Dublin†, has endeavoured to enforce the detestable doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance, by metaphysical arguments founded on an arbitrary explication of the term *moral duty*; from which he pretends to prove, that negative moral duties must never, on any account, be violated; and that passive obedience to supreme power, wherever placed, is a negative moral duty. In this inquiry, he makes no account of those instinc-

\* See the Appendix to vol. I. of Chev. Ramsay's Principles of Religion.

† The third edition of these sermons, which are three in number, was printed at London in the year 1713.

tive sentiments of morality whereof men are conscious; ascribing them to the blood and spirits, or to education and habit; and asserting, that the conduct of rational beings is to be directed, not by them, but by the dictates of sober and impartial reason. Locke's discourse against innate ideas and principles, is likewise too metaphysical. Some of his notions on that subject are, I believe, right; but he has not explained them with his wonted precision; and most of his arguments are founded on an ambiguous acceptation of the words *idea* and *innate*.

The author of the *Fable of the Bees* seems to have carried this mode of reasoning as far as it will go. If there had been no ambiguous words in the English language, the understanding of mankind would never have been affronted with his system. Many of our appetites become criminal only when excessive; and we have not always names to express that degree of indulgence which is consistent with virtue. The shameless word-catcher takes advantage of this, and confounds the innocent gratification with the excessive or criminal indulgence; calling both by the same name, and taking it for granted, that what he proves to be true of the one is also true of the other. What is it that may not be proved by this way of arguing? May not vice be proved to be virtue, and virtue to be vice? May not a regard to reputation, cleanliness, industry, generosity, conjugal love, be proved to be the same with vanity, luxury, avarice, profusion, sensuality? May it not be proved, that private virtues are private vices; and, consequently, that private vices are public benefits? Such a conclusion is indeed so easily made out by such logic, that nothing but ignorance, impudence, and a hard heart, is necessary to qualify a man for making it. If it be said, that considerable genius



must be employed in dressing up these absurd doctrines, so as to render them plausible; I would ask, who are the persons that think them plausible? Never did I hear of one man of virtue or learning, who did not both detest and despise them. They seem plausible, perhaps, to gamblers, highwaymen, and *petit maitres*; but it will not be pretended, that those gentlemen have leisure, inclination, or capacity, to reflect on what they read or hear, so as to separate truth from falsehood.

Among metaphysical writers, Mr. Hume holds a distinguished place. Every part of philosophy becomes metaphysic in his hands. His whole theory of the understanding is founded on the doctrine of impressions and ideas, which, as he explains it, is so contrary to fact, that nothing but the illusion of words could make it pass upon any reader. I have already given several instances of this author's metaphysical spirit. I shall give one more; which I beg leave to consider at some length; that I may have an opportunity of confuting a very dangerous error, and, at the same time, of displaying more minutely, than by this general description, the difference between metaphysical and philosophical investigation.

Does any one imagine, that moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues,—that justice, genius, and bodily strength, are virtues of the same kind; that they are contemplated with the same sentiments, and known to be virtues by the same criterion? Few, I presume, are of this opinion; but Mr. Hume has adopted it, and taken a great deal of pains to prove it. I shall demonstrate, that this very important error has arisen, either from inaccurate observation, or from his being imposed on by words not well understood, or rather from both causes.

It is true, that justice, great genius, and bodily strength, are all useful to the possessor and to society; and all agreeable to, or (which in this author's style amounts to the same thing) approved by every one who considers or contemplates them. They therefore, at least the two first, completely answer to our author's definition of virtue\*. And it would be easy to write a great book, to show the reasons why moral, intellectual, and corporeal abilities, yield pleasure to the beholder and possessor, and to trace out a number of analogies, real or verbal, subsisting between them. But this is nothing to the purpose: they may resemble in ten thousand respects, and yet differ as widely, as a beast or statue differs from a man. Let us trace the author's argument to its source.

Virtue is known by a certain agreeable feeling or sentiment, arising from the consciousness of certain affections or qualities in ourselves, or from the view of them in others. Granted. Justice, humanity, generosity, excite approbation;—a handsome face excites approbation;—great genius excites approbation: the effect or sentiment produced is the same in each instance: the object, or cause, must therefore, in each instance, be of the same kind. This is genuine metaphysic: but before a man can be misled by it, he must either find, on consulting his experience, that the feeling excited by the contemplation of these objects is the same in each instance; in which case I would say, that his feelings are defective, or himself an inaccurate observer of nature:—or he must suppose,

\* It is the nature, and indeed the definition, of virtue, "that it is a quality of the mind agreeable to, or approved by, every one who considers or contemplates it." *Hume's Essays*, vol. 2. p. 333. edit. 1767. Note.

Bodily qualities are indeed excluded by this definition, but admitted by our author in his subsequent reasonings.



that the word *approbation*, because written and pronounced the same way, does really mean the same thing in each of the three propositions above mentioned, in which case, I would say, that his judgment and ideas are confounded by the mere sound and shape of a word. I am conscious, that my approbation of a fine face is different in kind from my approbation of great genius; and that both are extremely different from my approbation of justice, humanity, and generosity: if I call these three different kinds of approbation by the same general name, I use that name in three different significations. Therefore moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues, are not of the same, but of different kinds.

I confess, says our author, that these three virtues are contemplated with three different kinds of approbation. But the same thing is true of different moral virtues: piety excites one kind of approbation, justice another, and compassion a third; the virtues of Cato excite our esteem, those of Cæsar our love: if, therefore, piety, justice, and compassion, be virtues of the same kind, notwithstanding that they excite different kinds of approbation, why should justice, genius, and beauty, be accounted virtues of different kinds\*?—This is another metaphysical argument; an attempt to determine by words what facts only can determine. I still insist on fact and experience. My sentiments, in regard to these virtues, are so diversified, and in each variety so peculiar, that I know, and am assured that piety, justice, and humanity, are distinct individual virtues of the same kind; and that piety, genius, and beauty, are virtues of different kinds. Applied to each of the former

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 258. Hume's Essays, *ubi supra*.

qualities, the word *virtue* means the same thing; but beauty is virtue in one sense, genius in another, and piety in a third.

Well, if the sentiments excited in you by the contemplation of these virtues, are so much diversified, and in each variety so peculiar, you must be able to explain in what respect your approbation of intellectual virtue differs from your approbation of moral; which I presume you will find no easy task.—It is not so difficult, Sir, as you seem to apprehend. When a man has acted generously, or justly, I praise him, and think him worthy of praise and reward, for having done his duty; when ungenerously or unjustly, I blame him; and think him worthy of blame and punishment; but a man deserves neither punishment nor blame for want of beauty or of understanding; nor reward nor praise for being handsome or ingenious.—But why are we thought worthy of blame and punishment for being unjust, and not for being homely, or void of understanding? The general conscience of mankind would reply, Because we have it in our power to be just, and ought to be so; but an idiot cannot help his want of understanding, nor an ugly man his want of beauty. This our author will not allow to be a satisfactory answer; because, says he, I have shown that free-will has no place with regard to the actions, no more than the qualities of men\*. What an immense metaphysical labyrinth should we have to run through if we were to disentangle ourselves out of this argument in the common course of logic! To shorten the controversy, I must beg leave to affirm, in my turn, that our moral actions are in our own power, though beauty and genius are not; and to appeal, for proof of this affirmation, to the second

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 260.



part of this Essay, or, rather, to the common sense of mankind.

Again, "Moral distinctions," says Mr. Hume, "arise from the natural distinctions of pain and pleasure; and when we receive those feelings from the general considerations of any quality or character, we denominate it virtuous or vitious. Now I believe no one will assert, that a quality can never produce pleasure or pain to the person who considers it, unless it be perfectly voluntary in the person who possesses it\*."—More metaphysic! and a sophism too—a *petitio principii*! Here our author endeavours to confound intellectual with moral virtue, by an argument which supposeth his own theory of virtue to be true; of which theory this confusion of the virtues is a necessary consequence. The reader must see, that this argument, if it prove any thing at all, might be made to prove that the smell or beauty of a rose, the taste of an apple, the hardness of steel, and the glittering of a diamond, as well as bodily strength and great genius, are all virtues of the same kind with justice, generosity, and gratitude.—Still we wander from the point. How often must it be repeated, that this matter is to be determined, not by metaphysical arguments founded on ambiguous words, but by facts and experience!

"Have I not appealed to facts?" he will say. "Are not all the qualities that constitute the great man, constancy, fortitude, magnanimity, as involuntary and necessary, as the qualities of the judgment and imagination?†" The term *great man* is so very equivocal, that I will have nothing to do with it. The vilest scoundrel on earth, if possessed of a title, immediately commences great man;

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 260.

† Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 259.



when he has with impunity perpetrated any extraordinary act of wickedness; murdered fifty thousand men: robbed all the houses of half a dozen provinces; or dexterously plundered his own country, to defray the expense of a ruinous war, contrived on purpose to satiate his avarice, or divert the public attention from his blunders and villanies. I speak of the qualities that constitute the *good man*, that is, of moral qualities; and these, I affirm, to be within every man's reach, though genius and beauty are not.

“But are not men afraid of passing for good-natured, lest that should be taken for want of understanding?—and do they not often boast of more debauches than they have been really engaged in, to give themselves airs of fire and spirit?\*” Yes, fools do the first, to recommend themselves to fools; and profligates the last, to recommend themselves to profligates: but he is little acquainted with the human heart, who does not perceive, that such sentiments are affected, and contrary to the way of thinking that is most natural to mankind.

“But are you not as jealous of your character, with regard to sense and knowledge, as to honour and courage?†” This question ought to be addressed to those in whom courage is a virtue, and the want of it a vice: and I am certain, there is not in his Majesty's service one officer or private man, who would not wish to be thought rather a valiant soldier, though of no deep reach, than a very clever fellow, with the addition of an infamous coward.—The term *honour* is of dubious import. According to the notions of these times, a man may blaspheme God, sell his country, murder his friend, pick the pocket of his fellow-sharper, and

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 257.

† Ibid.



employ his whole life in seducing others to vice and perdition, and yet be accounted a man of honour; provided he be accustomed to speak certain words, wear certain clothes, and haunt certain company. If this be the honour alluded to by the author, an honest man may, for a very slender consideration, renounce all pretensions to it. But if he allude (as I rather suppose) to those qualities of the heart and understanding which entitle one to general esteem and confidence, Mr. Hume knows, that this kind of honour is dearer to a man than life.

“Well, then, temperance is a virtue in every station; yet would you not choose to be convicted of drunkenness rather than of ignorance?\*”—I have heard of a witty parson, who, having been dismissed for irregularities, used afterwards, in conversation, to say, that he thanked God he was not cashiered for ignorance and insufficiency, but only for vice and immorality. According to our author’s doctrine, this speech was neither absurd nor profane: but I am sure the generality of mankind would be of a different opinion. To be ignorant of what we ought to know, is to be deficient in moral virtue; to profess to know what we are ignorant of, is falsehood, a breach of moral virtue: whether these vices be more or less atrocious than intemperance, must be determined by the circumstances of particular cases. To be ignorant of what we could not know, of what we do not profess to know, and of what it is not our duty to know, is no vice at all: and a man must have made some progress in debauchery, before he can say, from serious conviction, I would rather be chargeable with intemperance, than with ignorance of this kind.—These, and many of our author’s mistakes, must be imputed to want of

\* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 257.



knowledge of human nature: which I suppose is owing to his having confined his observation chiefly to the outside of what is called fashionable life, where the sentiments publicly avowed are often different from what is inwardly felt, and extremely different from the truth and simplicity of nature.

It appears, then, that our author's reasoning on the present subject, is not philosophical, but what I call *metaphysical*\*; being founded, not on fact, but on theory, and supported by ambiguous words and inaccurate experience.

The judgment of the wiser ancients in matters of morality, is doubtless of very great weight, but, in opposition to our own experience, can never preponderate: because this is our ultimate standard of truth. Mr. Hume endeavours to confirm his theory of virtue by authorities from the ancients, particularly the Stoics and Peripatetics. Though he had accomplished this, we might have appealed from their opinion, as well as from his, to our own feelings. But he fails in this, as in the other parts of his proof.

It is true, the Peripatetics and Stoics made Prudence the first (not the most important) of the cardinal virtues; because they conceived it necessary to enable a man to act his part aright in life, and because they thought it their duty to take every opportunity of improving their nature: but they never said, that an incurable defect of understanding is a vice, or that it is as much our duty to be learned and ingenious, as to be honest and grateful. "All the praise of virtue consists in action," says Cicero†, in the name of the Stoics, when

\* I do not contend, that this use of the word *metaphysical* is strictly proper: I mean nothing more, than to give the reader a notion of this particular mode of false reasoning: and, by satisfying him that it is *not philosophical*, to guard him against its influence.

† De Officiis, lib. I. cap. 6.



treating of this virtue of prudence. And, when explaining the comparative merit of the several classes of moral duty, he declares, that "All knowledge which is not followed by action, is unprofitable and imperfect, like a beginning without an end, or a foundation without a superstructure; and that the acquisition of the most sublime and most important science ought to be, and will by every good man be relinquished, when it interferes with the duties we owe our country, our parents, and society\*." Wisdom, indeed, he allows to be the first and most excellent of the virtues: but it is well known, that the Stoics made a distinction between Prudence and Wisdom. By prudence they meant that virtue which regulates our desires and aversions and fixes them on proper objects. Wisdom was another name for mental perfection: it comprehended all the virtues, the religious as well as the social and prudential; and was equally incompatible with vice and with error†. The wise man, the standard of Stoical excellence, was, by their own acknowledgement, an ideal character; the purest virtue attainable in this life being necessarily tainted with imperfection. Hence some have endeavoured to turn their notions of wisdom into ridicule; but I think, without reason. For is there any thing absurd or ridiculous in an artist working after a model of such perfection as he can never hope to equal? In the judgment of Aristotle and Bacon, the true poet forms his imitations of nature after a model of ideal perfection, which perhaps hath no existence but in his own mind‡. And are not Christians commanded to imitate the Deity himself, that great original and

\* De Officiis, lib. 1. cap. 43, 44.

† Id. ib.

‡ Aristot. Poetica. Bacon, De augmentis scientiarum, lib. 2.

standard of perfection, between whom and the most excellent of his creatures an infinite distance must remain for ever\*?

“The ancient moralists,” says Mr. Hume, “made no material distinction among the different species of mental endowments and defects†.” To every person who has read them, the contrary is well known. I might here fill many a page with quotations, but a few will suffice: “Man’s virtue and vice,” says Marcus Aurelius, “consists not in those affections in which we are passive, but in action. To a stone thrown upward, it is no evil to fall, nor good to have mounted‡.” And in another place, “The vain-glorious man placeth his good in the action of another; the sensual, in his own passive feelings; the wise man, in his own action§.” “The contemplative life,” says Plutarch, “when it fails to produce the active, is unprofitable\*\*.” “To acquire knowledge,” says Lucian, “is of no use, if we do not also frame our lives according to something better††.” It is remarkable that the Greek tragedians (I know not by what authority, for Homer’s idea is very different) represent Ulysses as a character more distin-

\* Matth. v. 48.

† Hume’s Essays, vol. 2. p. 387, 388.

‡ Ουδε η αρετη η κακια αυτε εν πεισει αλλα ενεργεια· τω αναρριφθεντι λιθω ουδεν κακον το κατενεχθηναι, ουδε αγαθον το κνενεχθηναι.

Lib ix. c. 17.

§ Ο μεν φιλοδοξος αλλοτριαν ενεργειαν ιδιον αγαθον υπολαμβανει· ο δε φιληδονος, ιδιαν πεισιν· ο δε νουν, εχων, ιδιαν πραξιν.

Lib. 6. c. 51.

\*\* Ο δε θεωρητικος βιος τε πρακτικη διαμαρτανων, ανωφελης.

Plutarch. de Educatione.

†† Ουδεν οφελος ην επισασθαι τα μαθηματα, ει μη τις αρχη η τον βιον ρυθμιζει προς το βελτιον.

Lucian. Conviv.



guished for political prudence or cunning, than for strict moral virtue; and often place him in such attitudes as make him appear odious on this very account\*. And Cicero in his Treatise of moral duties, often declares, that cunning, when it violates the rules of justice, is criminal and detestable. Does Virgil consign cripples and idiots, as well as tyrants, to Tartarus? does he say, that a great memory and handsome face, as well as a pure heart, were the passports to Elysium? No: Virgil was too good a man to injure the cause of virtue,

\* See particularly Sophocles. Philoct. vers. 100. and vers. 1260. I beg leave to quote a few very remarkable lines. Neoptolemus having, by the advice of Ulysses, fraudulently got possession of the arrows of Philoctetes, repents of what he had done, and is going to restore them. To deter him from his purpose, Ulysses threatens him with the resentment of the whole Grecian army.

*Neop.* Σοφος πεφυκως ουδεν εξαυδας σοφον.

*Ulys.* Συ δ' ουτε φωνεις, ουτε δρασειεις σοφον.

*Neop.* Α'λλ' ει δικαια, των σοφων κρεισσω ταδε.

*Ulys.* Και πως δικαιον, α γ' ελαβες βουλαις εμαις

Παλιν μεθειναι ταυτα; *Neop.* Την αμαρτιαν

Α'ισχραν αμαρτων, αναλαβειν πειρασομαι.

*Ulys.* Στρατον δ' Αχαιων ε φοβη πραισσων ταδε,

*Neop.* Ευν τω δικαιω τον σου ου ταρβω φοβον.

Vers. 1279.

—*Neop.* Wise as thou art, Ulysses,  
Thou talkest most idly. *Ulys.* Wisdom is not thine,  
Either in word or deed. *Neop.* Know, to be just  
Is better far than to be wise. *Ulys.* But where,  
Where is the justice, thus unauthoris'd,  
To give a treasure back thou owest to me,  
And to my counsels? *Neop.* I have done a wrong,  
And I will try to make atonement for it.

*Ulys.* Dost thou not fear the power of Greece? *Neop.* I fear  
Nor Greece, nor thee, when I am doing right.

Franklin.

Throughout the whole play, the fire and generosity of the young hero (so well becoming the son of Achilles) is finely opposed to the caution and craft of the politician, and forms one of the most striking contrasts that can well be imagined.

and too wise to shock common sense by so preposterous a distribution of reward and punishment. The impious, the unnatural, the fraudulent, the avaricious: adulterers, incestuous persons, traitors, corrupt judges, venal statesmen, tyrants, and the minions of tyrants, are those whom he dooms to eternal misery; and he peoples Elysium with the shades of the pure and the pious, of heroes who have died in defence of their country, of ingenious men who have employed their talents in recommending piety and virtue, and of all who by acts of beneficence have merited the love and gratitude of their fellow creatures\*.

\* Virgil. *Æneid* vi. 547—665. As the moral sentiments of nations may often be learned from their fables and traditions, as well as from their history and philosophy, it will not perhaps be deemed foreign from our design, to give the following brief abstract of this poet's sublime theory of future rewards and punishments; the outlines of which, he is known to have taken from the Pythagoreans, and Platonists, who probably were indebted for them to some ancient tradition.

The shades below are divided by Virgil into three districts, or provinces. On this side Styx, the souls of those whose bodies have not been honoured with the rites of sepulture, wander about in a melancholy condition for a hundred years, before they are permitted to pass the river. When this period expires, or when their bodies are buried, they are ferried over, and appear before Minos and the other judges, who allot them such a mansion as their lives on earth are found to have deserved. They, who have been of little, or no use to mankind, or who have not been guilty of any very atrocious crimes; or whose crimes, though atrocious, were the effects rather of an unhappy destiny, than of wilful depravation, are disposed of in different parts of the *regions of mourning*, (*lugentes campi*), where they undergo a variety of purifying pains. From thence, when thoroughly refined from all the remains of vice, they pass into Elysium, where they live a thousand years in a state of happiness; and then, after taking a draught of the waters of oblivion, are sent back to earth to animate new bodies.—Those who have been guilty of great crimes, as impiety, want of natural affection, adultery, incest, breach of trust, subverting the liberties of their country, &c. are delivered by the judge Rhadamanthus to Tisiphone and the other



The Peripatetics held prudence to be an active principle, diffused through the whole of moral virtue\*. “None but a good man,” says Aristotle, “can be prudent;” and a little after, “It is not pos-

furies, who shut them up in an immense dungeon of darkness and fire, called *Tartarus*, where their torments are unspeakable and eternal.—The souls of good men are re-united, either with the Deity himself, or with that universal spirit which he created in the beginning, and which animates the world; and their shades, ghosts, or *idola*, enjoy for ever the repose and pleasures of Elysium. These shades might be seen, though not touched; they resembled the bodies with which they had formerly been invested; and retained a consciousness of their identity, and a remembrance of their past life, with almost the same affections and character that had distinguished them on earth.

On this system, Virgil has founded a series of the sublimest descriptions that are to be met with in poetry. Milton alone has equalled them in the first and second books of *Paradise Lost*. Homer’s *Necyomanteia*, in the eleventh of the *Odyssey*, has the merit of being original; but Virgil’s imitation is confessedly far superior. The dream of Henry, in the seventh canto of the *Henriade*, notwithstanding the advantages that the author might have drawn from the Christian theology, is but a trifle, compared with the magnificent and stupendous scenery exhibited in the sixth book of the *Æneid*.

This theory of future rewards and punishments, however imperfect, is consonant enough with the hopes and fears of men, and their natural notions of virtue and vice, to render the poet’s narrative alarming and interesting in a very high degree. But were an author to adopt Mr. Hume’s theory of virtue and the soul, and endeavour to set it off in a poetical description, all the powers of human genius could not save it from being ridiculous. A metaphysician may “blunder” for a long time, “round about a meaning,” without giving any violent shock to an inattentive reader: but a poet who clothes his thoughts with imagery, and illustrates them by examples, must come to the point at once; and, if he means to please, and not disgust his readers, to move their admiration, and not their contempt, must be careful not to contradict their natural notions, especially in matters of such deep and universal concern as morality and religion.

\* *Ἀνάγκη τὴν φρονήσιν εἶναι—πρακτικὴν.*

*Ethic. ad Nicom. vi. 5.*



sible for a man to be properly good without prudence; nor prudent without moral virtue\*." Will it yet be said, that the ancient moralists made no material distinction between moral and intellectual virtues? Is it not evident, that though they considered both as necessary to the formation of a perfect character, and sometimes discoursed of both in the same treatise or system, yet they deemed the latter valuable only as means to qualify us for the former, and insignificant, or even odious, when they failed to answer this end?

"We may," says Mr. Hume, "by perusing the titles of the chapters in Aristotle's Ethics, be convinced, that he ranks courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, modesty, prudence, and a *manly freedom* among the virtues, as well as justice and friendship†." True; but if our learned metaphysician had extended his researches a little beyond the *titles* of those chapters, he would have found, that, in Aristotle's judgment, "Moral virtue is a voluntary disposition or habit; and that moral approbation or disapprobation are excited by those actions and affections only which are in our own power; that is, of which the first motion arises in ourselves, and proceeds from no extrinsic cause‡."

\* Ἀδύνατον φρονιμον εἶναι μὴ ὄντα αγαθον.—Οὐχ' οἷον αγαθον εἶναι κυριως ἀνευ φρονησεως· οὐδὲ φρονιμον, ἀνευ τῆς ηθικῆς ἀρετῆς.  
Id. vi. 13.

See the elegant paraphrase of Andronicus the Rhodian, upon these passages.

† Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 388.—The term *manly freedom* does not express the meaning of the Greek ελευθεριότης. Mr. Hume was perhaps misled by the etymology: but he ought to have known, that by this word the philosopher denotes *that virtue which consists in the moderate use of wealth*.—περὶ χρηματα μέσότης. See Ethic. ad Nicom. lib. 4. cap. 1, 2.

‡ Ethic. ad Nicom. iii. 1.—ii. 6. Mag. Mor. i. 15. Andronicus Rhodius, p. 89, 90, 188. edit. Cantab. 1679. Stephanus, in voce προαιρετικος.



This is true philosophy : it is accurate, perspicuous, and just, and very properly determines the degree of merit of our intellectual and constitutional virtues. A man makes proficiency in knowledge : if in this he has acted from a desire to improve his nature, and qualify himself for moral virtue, that desire, and the action consequent upon it, are virtuous, laudable, and of good desert. Is a man possessed of great genius ?—this invests him with dignity and distinction, and qualifies him for noble undertakings : but this of itself is no moral virtue ; because it is not a disposition resulting from a spontaneous effort. Is his constitution naturally disposed to virtue ? he still has it in his power to be vitious, and therefore his virtue is truly meritorious ; though not so highly as that of another man, who, in spite of outrageous appetites, and tempting circumstances, hath attained an equal degree of moral improvement. A man constitutionally brave, generous, or grateful, commands our admiration more than another, who struggles to overcome the natural baseness of his temper. The former is a sublimer object, and may be of greater service to society ; and as his virtue is secured by constitution as well as by inclination, we repose in it without fear of being disappointed. Yet perhaps the latter, if his merit were equally conspicuous, would be found equally worthy of our moral approbation. Indeed, if his virtue be so irresolute as to leave him wavering between good and evil, he is not entitled to praise : such irresolution is criminal, because he may, and ought to correct it ; we cannot, and we ought not to trust him, till we see a strong prepossession established in favour of virtue.—However, let us love virtue wherever we find it : whether the immediate gift of heaven, or the effect of human industry co-operating with divine influence, it always deserves our esteem and veneration.



The reader may now form an estimate of that author's attention, who says, that "the ancient moralists made no material distinction among the different species of mental endowments and defects." If any one is disposed to think, that I have made out my point rather by inference than by direct proof, I submit to his consideration the following passages, which are too plain to need a commentary.

Having proposed a general distribution of our mental powers, (which seems to amount to this, that some of them fit us for knowledge, and others for action) Aristotle proceeds in this manner. "According to this distribution, virtue is also divided into intellectual and moral. Of the former kind are wisdom, intelligence, and prudence; of the latter, temperance and frugal liberality. When we speak of morals, we do not say, that a man is wise or intelligent, but that he is gentle or temperate. Yet we praise a wise man in respect of his dispositions [or habits]: for laudable dispositions are what we call virtues\*."

"The virtues of the soul," says Cicero, "and of its principal part the understanding, are various, but may be reduced to two kinds. The first are those which nature has implanted, and which are called *not voluntary*. The second kind are more properly called *virtues*, because they depend on the will; and these, as objects of approbation, are transcendently superior. Of the former kind are docility, memory, and all the virtues distinguished

\* Διορίζεται δε και η αρετη κατα την διαφοραν ταυτην. λεγομεν γαρ αυτων τας μεν διανοητικας, τας δε ηθικας. σοφιαν μεν, και συνεσιν, και φρονησιν, διανοητικας· ελευθεριοτητα δε και σωφροσυνην, ηθικας. λεγοντες γαρ περι τε ηθους, ε λεγομεν, οτι σοφος, η συνετος, αλλ' οτι πραος, η σωφρων. επαινεμεν δε και τον σοφον κατ'α την εξιν· των εξων δε τας επαινετας αρετας λεγομεν.

*Ethic. ad Nicom. lib. 1. sub. fin.*



by the general name of genius, or capacity: persons possessed of them are called ingenious. The latter class comprehends *the great and genuine virtues*, which we denominate *voluntary*, as prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice, and others of the same kind\*.”

The word *virtue* has indeed great latitude of signification. It denotes any quality of a thing tending to the happiness of a percipient being; it denotes that quality, or perfection of qualities, by which a thing is fitted to answer its end; sometimes it denotes power or agency in general; and sometimes any habit which improves the faculties of the human mind. In the first three senses we ascribe virtue to the soul, and to the body, to brutes, and to inanimate things; in the last, to our intellectual as well as moral nature. And no doubt instances may be found of ambiguity and want of precision, even in the best moralists, from an improper use of this word. Yet I believe this attempt of Mr. Hume's is the first that has been made to prove, that among these very different sorts of virtue there is little or no difference. Our author seems indeed to have a singular aversion to that kind of curiosity, which, not satisfied with knowing the names, is industrious to discover the natures of

\* Animi autem, et ejus animi partis quæ princeps est, quæque mens nominatur, plures sunt virtutes, sed duo prima genera: unum earum quæ ingenerantur suapte natura, appellanturque non voluntariæ: alterum autem earum, quæ in voluntate, positæ, magis proprie eo nomine appellari solent; quarum est excellens in animorum laude præstantia. Prioris generis est docilitas, memoria; qualia fere omnia appellantur uno ingenii nomine; easque virtutes qui habent ingeniosi vocantur. Alterum autem genus est *magnarum verarumque virtutum*, quas appellamus voluntarias, ut prudentiam, temperantiam, fortitudinem, justitiam, et reliquas ejusdem generis.—Virtutes voluntariæ propriè virtutes appellantur, multumque excellent, &c.

—Cicero *De Finibus*, lib. 5. cap. 13. ex editione Davisii.



things. When he finds two or three different things called by the same name, he will rather write fifty pages of metaphysic to prove that they are the same, than give himself the trouble to examine them so as to see what they really are\*. Is it not strange, that a man of science should ever have taken it in his head, that the characteristic of a genus is a sufficient description of a species? He might as well have supposed, that because perception and self-motion belong to animal life in general, it is therefore a sufficient definition of man, to call him a self-moving and percipient creature: from which profound principle it clearly follows, that man is a beast, and that a beast is a man.

By such reasoning as Mr. Hume has used on the present occasion, it would be easy to prove any doctrine. The method is this:—and I hope those who may hereafter choose to astonish the world with a system of metaphysical paradoxes, will do me the honour and the justice to acknowledge, that I was the first who unfolded the whole art and mystery of that branch of manufacture within the compass of one short *recipe*:—Take a word (an abstract term is the most convenient) which admits of more than one signification; and by the help of a predicate and copula, form a proposition, suitable to your system, or to your humour, or to any other thing you please, except truth. When laying down your premises, you are to use the name of the quality or subject, in one sense; and, when inferring your conclusion, in another. You are then to urge a few equivocal facts, very slightly examined, (the more slightly the better), as a further proof of the said conclusion; and to shut up all with citing some ancient authorities, either real or fictitious,

\* See another remarkable instance, Part 2. chap. 2. sect. 1. of this Essay.



as may best suit your purpose. A few occasional strictures on religion as an unphilosophical thing, and a sneer at the *Whole Duty of Man*\*, or any other good book, will give your Dissertation what many are pleased to call a *liberal turn*; and will go near to convince the world, that you are a candid philosopher, a manly free-thinker, and a very fine writer.

It is to no purpose that our author calls this a verbal dispute, and sometimes condescends to soften matters by an *almost*, or some such evasive word. His doctrine obviously tends to confound all our ideas of virtue and duty, and to make us consider ourselves as mere machines, acted upon by external and irresistible impulse, and not more accountable for moral blemishes, than for ignorance, want of understanding, poverty, deformity, and disease. If the reader think as seriously of the controversy as I do, he will pardon the length of this digression.

I hope it now appears, that there is a kind of metaphysic, which, whatever respectable names it may have assumed, deserves contempt or censure from every lover of truth. If it be detrimental to science, it is equally so to the affairs of life. Whenever one enters on business, the metaphysical spirit must be laid aside, otherwise it will render him ridiculous, perhaps detestable. Sure it will not be said, that any portion of this spirit is necessary to form a man for stations of high importance. For these, a turn to metaphysic would be as effectual a disqualification as want of understanding. The metaphysician is cold, wavering, distrustful, and perpetually ruminates on words, distinctions, arguments and systems. He attends to the events of life with a view chiefly to the system that hap-

\* See Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 388. edit. 1767.



pens for the time to predominate in his imagination, and to which he is anxious to reconcile every appearance. His observation is therefore partial and inaccurate, because, he contemplates nature through the medium of his favourite theory, which is always false; so that experience, which enlarges, ascertains, and methodizes, the knowledge of other men, serves only to heighten the natural darkness and confusion of his. His literary studies are conducted with the same spirit, and produce the same effects——Whereas, to the administration of great affairs, truth and steadiness of principle, constancy of mind, intuitive sagacity, extreme quickness in apprehending the present and anticipating the future, are indispensably necessary. Whatever tends to weaken and unsettle the mind, to cramp the imagination, to fix the attention on minute and trifling objects, and withdraw it from those enlarged prospects of nature and mankind, in which true genius loves to expatiate; whatever has this tendency, and surely metaphysic has it, is the bane of genius, and of every thing that is great in human nature.

In the lower walks of life, our theorist will be oftener the object of ridicule than of detestation. Yet even here, the man is to be pitied, who, in matters of moment, happens to be connected with a staunch metaphysician. Doubts, disputes, and conjectures, will be the plague of his life. If his associate form a system of action or inaction, of doubt or confidence, he will stick by it, however absurd, as long as he has one verbal argument unanswered to urge in defence of it. In accounting for the conduct of others, he will reject obvious causes, and set himself to explore such as are more remote and refined. Making no proper allowance for the endless variety of human character, he will suppose all men influenced, like himself, by system.



and verbal argument: certain causes, in his judgment, must of necessity produce certain effects; for he has twenty reasons ready to offer, by which it is demonstrable, that they cannot fail: and it is well, if experience, at last convince him, that there was a small verbal ambiguity in his principles, and that his views of mankind were not quite so extensive as they ought to have been. In a word, unless he be very good-natured, and of a passive disposition, his refinements will do more harm than even the stiff stupidity of an idiot. If inclined to fraud, or any sort of vice, he will never be at a loss for an evasion, which, if it should not satisfy his associate, will perplex and plague him most effectually. I need not enlarge; the reader may conceive the rest. To aid his fancy, he will find some traits of this character, in one of its most amusing and least disagreeable forms, delineated with a masterly pencil in the person of Walter Shandy, Esquire.

It is astonishing to consider, how little mankind value the good within their reach, and how ardently they pursue what nature has placed beyond it; how blindly they over-rate what they have no experience of, and how fondly they admire what they do not understand. This verbal metaphysic has been dignified with the name of *science*, and verbal metaphysicians have been reputed philosophers, and men of genius. Doubtless a man of genius may, by the fashion of the times, be seduced into these studies: but that particular cast of mind which fits a man for them, and recommends them to his choice, is not genius, but a minute and feeble understanding; capable indeed of being made, by long practice expert in the management of words; but which never did, and never will, qualify any man for the discovery or illustration of sentiment. For



what is genius? What, but sound judgment, sensibility of heart, and a talent for accurate and extensive observation? And will sound judgment prepare a man for being imposed on by words? will sensibility of heart render him insensible to his own feelings and inattentive to those of other men? will a talent for accurate and extensive observation, make him ignorant of the real phenomena of nature, and consequently, incapable of detecting what is false or equivocal in the representation of facts? And yet, when facts are fairly and fully represented; when human sentiments are strongly felt, and perspicuously described; and when the meaning of words is ascertained, and the same word has always the same idea annexed to it,—there is an end of metaphysic.

A body is neither vigorous nor beautiful, in which the size of some members is above, and that of others below their due proportion: every part must have its proper size and strength, otherwise the result of the whole will be deformity and weakness. Neither is real genius consistent with a disproportionate strength of the reasoning powers above those of taste and imagination. Those minds in whom all the faculties are united in their due proportion, are far superior to the puerilities of metaphysical scepticism. They trust to their own feelings, which are strong and decisive, and leave no room for hesitation or doubts about their authenticity. They see through moral subjects at one glance; and what they say, carries both the heart and the understanding along with it. When one has long drudged in the dull and unprofitable pages of metaphysic, how pleasing the transition to a moral writer of true genius! Would you know what that genius is, and where it may be found? Go to Shakespeare, to Bacon, to Johnson, to Mon-



tesquieu, to Rousseau\*; and when you have studied them, return, if you can, to Hume, and Hobbes, and Montesquieu, and Leibnitz, and Spinoza. If, while you learned wisdom from the former, your heart ex-

\* As several persons, highly respectable both for their talents and principles, have desired to know my reasons for joining Rousseau's name to those of Bacon, Shakespeare, Johnson, and Montesquieu, I beg leave to take this opportunity of explaining my sentiments in regard to that celebrated author.

It is because I consider Rousseau as *a moral writer of true genius*, that I mention his name in this place. Sensibility of heart; a talent for extensive and accurate observation; liveliness and ardour of fancy; and a style copious, nervous, and elegant, beyond that of any other French writer,—are his distinguishing characteristics. In argument he is not always equally successful, for he often mistakes declamation for proof, and hypothesis for fact; but his eloquence, when addressed to the heart, over-powers with force irresistible. A greater number of important facts relating to the human mind are recorded in his works, than in all the books of all the sceptical philosophers ancient and modern. And he appears in general to be a friend to virtue, to mankind, to natural religion, and sometimes to Christianity.

Yet none even of his best works are free from absurdity. His reasoning, on the effects of the sciences, and on the origin and progress of human society, are diffuse, inaccurate, and often weak; much perverted by theories of his own, as well as by too implicit an admittance of the vague assertions of travellers, and of the systems and doctrines of some favourite French Philosophers: and he seems, in these, and frequently too in his other writings, to consider animal pleasure and bodily accomplishments as the happiness and perfection of man. His plan of education, though admirable in many parts, is in some injudicious and dangerous, and impracticable as a whole. The character of Julia's Lover is drawn with a masterly hand indeed, and well conducted throughout; but the lady has two characters, and those incompatible;—the Wife of Wolmar is quite a different person from the mistress of St. Preux. Wolmar himself is an impossible character; destitute of principle, yet of rigid virtue; destitute of feeling, yet capable of tenderness and attachment; delicate in his notions of honour, yet not ashamed to marry a woman whom he knew to be, to all intents and purposes, devoted to another.

Some of this author's remarks on the spirit of Christianity, and on the character of its Divine Founder, are not only ex-



ulted within you, and rejoiced to contemplate the sublime and successful efforts of human intellect; perhaps it may now be of use, as a lesson of humility, to have recourse to the latter, and, for awhile

cellent, but transcendently so, and I believe no Christian ever read them without feeling his heart warmed, and his faith confirmed. But what he says—of the absurdities which he fancies to be contained in the sacred history,—of the impropriety of the evidence of miracles,—of the analogy between those of Jesus Christ and the tricks of jugglers,—of the insignificancy and impertinence of prayer,—of the sufficiency of human reason for discovering a complete and comfortable scheme of natural religion,—of the discouraging nature of the terms of salvation offered in the Gospel,—of the measure of evidence that ought to accompany divine revelation (which, as he states it, would be incompatible with man's free agency and moral probation)—what he says of these, and of several other theological points of great importance, betrays a degree of ignorance and prejudice, of which, as a philosopher, as a scholar, and as a man, he should have been utterly ashamed. He appears to be distressed with his doubts; and yet, without having ever examined whether they be well or ill-founded, scruples not to exert all his eloquence on purpose to infuse them into others; a conduct, which I must ever condemn as illiberal, unjust, and cruel. Had Rousseau studied the scripture, and the writings of rational divines, with as much care as he seems to have employed in reading the books, and listening to the conversation of French infidels, and in attending to the unchristian practices and doctrines warranted by some ecclesiastical establishments; I may venture to assure him, that his mind would have been much more at ease, his works much more valuable, and his memory much dearer to all good men.

Rousseau is, in my opinion, a great philosophical genius, but wild, irregular, and often self-contradictory; disposed, from the fashion of the times, and from his desire of being reputed a bold speaker and freethinker, to adopt the doctrines of infidelity; but of a heart too tender, and an imagination too lively, to permit him to become a thorough-paced infidel. Had he lived in an age less addicted to hypothesis, he might have distinguished himself as a moral philosopher of the first rank. What pity, that a proper sense of his superiority to his contemporaries upon the continent could not preserve him from the contagion of their example! For, though now it is the fashion for every French declaimer to talk of Bacon and Newton, I question, whether in any age since the days of



to behold the picture of a soul wandering from thought to thought, without knowing where to fix; and from a total want of feeling, or a total ignorance of what it feels, mistaking names for things, verbal distinctions and analogies for real difference and similitude, and the obscure insinuations of a bewildered understanding, puzzled with words, and perverted with theory, for the sentiments of nature, and the dictates of reason. A metaphysician, exploring the recesses of the human heart has just such a chance for finding the truth, as a man with microscopic eyes would have for finding the road. The latter might amuse himself with contemplating the various mineral strata that are diffused along the expansion of a needle's point; but of the face of nature he could make nothing; he would start back with horror from the caverns yawning between the mountainous grains of sand that lie before him; but the real gulf or mountain he could not see at all.

Is the futility of metaphysical systems exaggerated beyond the truth by this allusion? Tell me,

Socrates, the building of fanciful theories was so epidemical as in the present. If the men of learning formerly employed their ingenuity in defending the theories of that philosopher by whose name they were ambitious to be distinguished; they are now no less industrious in devising and vindicating, each man a theory of his own.

To conclude: the writings of this author, with all their imperfections, may be read by the philosopher with advantage, as they often direct to the right observation and interpretation of nature; and by the Christian without detriment, as the cavils they contain against religion are too slight and too paradoxical to weaken the faith of any one who is tolerably instructed in the principles and evidence of Christianity. To the man of taste they can never fail to recommend themselves, by the irresistible charms of the composition.

The improprieties in Rousseau's late conduct, appear to me to have arisen rather from bodily infirmity than from moral depravation, and consequently to render him an object of forbearance and pity, rather than of persecution or ridicule.



then, in which of those systems I shall find such a description of the soul of man as would enable me to know what it is. A great and excellent author observes, that if all human things were to perish except the works of Shakespeare, it might still be known from them what sort of creature man was\*:—A sentiment nobly imagined, and as just as it is sublime! Can the same thing be said with truth of any one, or of all the metaphysical treatises that have been written on the nature of man? If any inhabitant of another planet were to read *The Treatise of Human Nature*, what notions of human nature could he gather from it?—That man must believe one thing by instinct, and must also believe the contrary by reason:—That the universe is nothing but a *heap* of perceptions unperceived by any substance: That this universe, for any thing man knows to the contrary, might have made itself, that is, existed before it existed; as we have no reason to believe that it proceeded from any cause, notwithstanding it may have had a beginning:—That though a man could bring himself to believe, yea, and have reason to believe, that every thing in the universe proceeds from some cause, yet it would be unreasonable for him to believe that the universe itself proceeds from a cause:—That the soul of man is not the same this moment it was the last; that we know not what it is; that it is not one, but many things; and that it is nothing at all;—and yet, that in this soul is the agency of all the causes that operate throughout the sensible creation;—and yet, that in this soul there is neither power nor agency, nor any idea of either:—That if thieves, cheats, and cut-throats, deserve to be hanged, cripples, idiots, and diseased persons, should not be permitted to live; be-

• Lord Lyttleton's *Dialogues of the Dead*.



cause the imperfections of the latter, and the faults of the former, are on the very same footing, both being *disapproved* by those who contemplate them:—That the perfection of human knowledge is to doubt:—That man ought to believe nothing, and yet that man's belief ought to be influenced and determined by certain principles:—That we ought to doubt of every thing, yea of our doubts themselves; and therefore the utmost that philosophy can do, is to give a doubtful solution of doubtful doubts\*:—That nature continually imposes on us, and continually counteracts herself, by giving us sagacity to detect the imposture:—That we are necessarily and unavoidably determined to act and think in certain cases after a certain manner, but that we ought not to submit to this unavoidable necessity; and that they are fools who do so:—That man, in all his perceptions, actions, and volitions, is a mere passive machine, and has no separate existence of his own, being entirely made up of other things, of the existence of which, however, he is by no means certain; and yet, that the nature of all things depends so much upon man, that two and two could not be equal to four, nor fire produce heat, nor the sun light, without an express act of the human understanding:—That none of our actions are in our power; that we ought to exercise power over our actions; and that there is no such thing as power:—That body and motion may be regarded as the cause of thought; and that body does not exist:—That the universe exists in the mind; and that the mind does not exist:—That the human understanding, acting alone, does en-

\* Strange as this expression may seem, it is not without a precedent. The fourth section of Mr. Hume's *Essays on the Human Understanding* is called, *Sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the understanding*; and the fifth section bears this title, *Sceptical solution of these doubts*.

tirely subvert itself, and prove by argument, that by argument nothing can be proved:—These are a few of the many sublime mysteries brought to light by this great philosopher. But these, however they may illuminate our terrestrial *literati*, would convey no information to the planetary stranger, except perhaps that the sage metaphysician knew nothing of this subject.

What a strange detail! does not the reader exclaim? Can it be, that any man should ever bring himself to think, or imagine that he could bring others to think so absurdly! What a taste, what a heart must he possess, whose delight it is, to represent nature as a chaos, and man as a monster; to search for deformity and confusion, where others rejoice in the perception of order and beauty; and to seek to imbitter the happiest moments of human life, namely, those we employ in contemplating the works of creation, and adoring their Author, by this suggestion, equally false and malevolent, that the moral as well as material world, is nothing but darkness, dissonance, and perplexity!

- “ Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds
- “ Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
- “ Abominable, unutterable, and worse
- “ Than fable yet hath feign'd, or fear conceiv'd !”

Were this system a true one, we should be little obliged to him who gives it to the public; for we could hardly imagine a greater misfortune than such a cast of understanding as would make us believe it. But founded, as it is, in words misunderstood, and facts misrepresented;—supported, as it is, by sophistry so egregious, and often so puerile, that we can hardly conceive how even the author himself should be imposed upon by it;—surely he who attempts to obtrude it on the weak and unwary, must have something in his disposition,



which, to a man of a good heart, or good taste, can never be the object of envy.

We are told, that the end of scepticism, as it was taught by Pyrrho, Sextus Empiricus, and other ancients, was to obtain *indisturbance*. I know not whether this be the end our modern sceptics have in view; if it is, the means they employ for attaining it are strangely preposterous. If the prospect of nature exhibited in their systems produce tranquillity or indisturbance, how dreadful must that tranquillity be! It is like that of a man, turned adrift amidst a dark and tempestuous ocean, in a crazy skiff, with neither rudder nor compass, who, exhausted by the agitations of despair and distraction, loses at last all sense of his misery, and becomes totally stupid. In fact, the only thing, that can enable sceptics to endure existence, is insensibility. And how far that is consistent with delicacy of mind, let those among them explain who are ambitious of passing for men of taste.

It is remarked by a very ingenious and amiable writer, that "many philosophers have been infidels, few men of taste and sentiment\*." This, if I mistake not, holds equally true of our sceptics in philosophy, and infidels in religion: and it holds true of both for the same reason. The views and expectations of the infidel and sceptic are so full of horror, that to a man of taste, that is, of sensibility and imagination, they are insupportable. On the other hand, what true religion and true philosophy dictate of God, and providence, and man, is so charming, so consonant with all the finer and nobler feelings in human nature, that every man of taste who hears of it must wish it to be true: and I never yet heard of one person of candour, who wished to find the evidence of the gospel satisfac-

\* Dr. Gregory's *Comparative View*, p. 201. fourth edition.



tory, and did not find it so. Dull imaginations and hard hearts can bear the thoughts of endless confusion, of virtue depressed and vice triumphant, of an universe peopled with fiends and furies, of creation annihilated, and chaos restored to remain a scene of darkness and solitude for ever and for ever: But it is not so with the benevolent and tender-hearted; their notions are regulated by another standard; their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, are quite of a different kind.

The moral powers and the powers of taste are more congenial than is commonly imagined; and he who is destitute of the latter, will ever be found as incapable to describe or judge of the former, as a man wanting the sense of smell is to decide concerning relishes. Nothing is more true, than that "a little learning is a dangerous thing." If we are but a little acquainted with one part of a complicated system, how is it possible for us to judge aright, either of the nature of the whole, or the fitness of that part! And a little knowledge of one small part of the mental system, is all that any man can be allowed to have, who is defective in imagination, sensibility, and the other powers of taste. Yet, as ignorance is apt to produce temerity, I should not be surprised to find such men most forward to attempt reducing the philosophy of human nature to system: and, if they made the attempt, I should not wonder that they fell into the most important mistakes. Like a short-sighted landscape painter, they might possibly delineate some of the largest and roughest figures with tolerable exactness: but of the minuter objects, some would wholly escape their notice, and others appear blotted and distorted, on which nature had bestowed the utmost delicacy of colour, and harmony of proportion.



The modern sceptical philosophy is as corrupt a body of science as ever appeared in the world. And it deserves our notice, that the most considerable of its adherents and promoters were more eminent for subtlety of reason, than for sensibility of taste. We know that this was the case with Malebranche, of whom Mr. D'Alembert says, that he could not read the most sublime verses without weariness and disgust\*. This was also the case with another author, to whom our later sceptics are more obliged than they seem willing to acknowledge, I mean Mr. Hobbes; whose translation of Homer bears just such a resemblance to the Iliad and Odyssey, as a putrefying carcase bears to a beautiful and vigorous human body. Of the taste of our later sceptics, I leave the reader to judge from his own observation.

The philosophy of the mind, if such as it ought to be, would certainly interest us more than any other science. Are the sceptical treatises on this subject interesting? Do they bring conviction to the judgment, or delight to the fancy? Do they either reach the heart, or seem to proceed from it? Do they make us better acquainted with ourselves, or better prepared for the business of life? Do they not rather enfeeble and harass the soul, divert its attention from every thing that can enlarge and improve it, give it a disrelish for itself, and for every thing else, and disqualify it alike for action, and for useful knowledge?

Other causes might be assigned for the present degeneracy of the moral sciences. I shall mention one, which I rather choose to take notice of, and insist upon, because it has been generally overlooked. Des Cartes and Malebranche introduced the fashion, which continues to this day, of neglect-

\* *Essai sur le Gout.*



ing the ancients in all their philosophical inquiries. We seem to think, because we are confessedly superior in some sciences, that we must be so in all. But that this is a rash judgment, may easily be made appear, even on the supposition, that human genius is nearly the same in all ages.

When accidental discovery, long experience, or profound investigation, are the means of advancing a science, it is reasonable to expect, that the improvements of that science will increase with length of time. Accordingly we find, that in natural philosophy, natural history, and some parts of mathematical learning, the moderns are far superior to the ancients. But the science of human nature, being attainable rather by intuition than by deep reasoning or nice experiment, must depend for its cultivation upon other causes. Different ages and nations have different customs. Sometimes it is the fashion to be reserved and affected, at other times to be simple and sincere: sometimes, therefore, it will be easy, and at other times difficult to gain a competent knowledge of human nature by observation. In the old romances, we seek for human nature in vain; the manners are all affected; prudery is the highest, and almost the only ornament of the women: and a fantastical honour of the men: but the writers adapted themselves to the prevailing taste, and painted the manners as they saw them. In our own country, we have seen various modes of affectation, successively prevail within a few years. To say nothing of present times; every body knows, how much pedantry, libertinism, and false wit, contributed to disguise human nature in the last century. And I apprehend, that in all monarchies one mode or other of artificial manners must always prevail; to the formation of which, the character of princes,



the taste of the times, and a variety of other causes will co-operate.

Montesquieu's opinion, that the courts of monarchs must always of necessity be corrupt, I cannot subscribe to. I think, that virtue may be, and sometimes is, the principle of action, even in the highest offices of monarchy: my meaning is, that, under this form of government, human manners must generally deviate, more or less, from the simplicity of nature, and that, consequently, human sentiments must be of more difficult investigation than under some other forms. In Courts, it seems requisite, for the sake of that order which is essential to dignity, to establish certain punctilios in dress, language, and gesture: there too, the most inviolable secresy is expedient; and there, where men are always under the eye of their superiors, and for the most part engaged in the pursuits of ambition or interest, a smoothness of behaviour will naturally take place, which, among persons of ordinary talents, and ordinary virtue, must on many occasions degenerate into hypocrisy. The customs of the court are always imitated by the higher ranks; the middle ranks follow the higher; and the people come after as fast as they can. It is however, in the last mentioned class, where nature appears with the least disguise: but, unhappily for moral science, the vulgar are seldom objects of curiosity, either to our philosophers, or historians.

The influence of these causes, in distinguishing human sentiments, will, I presume, be greater or less, according as the monarchy partakes more or less of democratical principles.—There is, indeed, one set of sentiments, which monarchy and modern manners are peculiarly fitted for disclosing, I mean those that relate to gallantry: but whether these tend to make human nature more or less known, might perhaps bear a question.



Modern history ought, on many accounts, to interest us more than the ancient. It describes manners that are familiar to us, events whereof we see and feel the consequences, political establishments on which our property and security depend, and places and persons in which experience or tradition has already given us a concern. And yet I believe it will be generally acknowledged, that the ancient histories, particularly of Greece and Rome, are more interesting than those of later times. In fact, the most affecting part, both of history and of poetry, is that which best displays the characters, manners, and sentiments of men. Histories that are deficient in this respect, may communicate instruction to the geographer, the warrior, the genealogist, and the politician ; but will never please the general taste, because they excite no passion, and awaken no sympathy. Now, I cannot help thinking that the personages described in modern history have, with a very few exceptions, a stiffness and reserve about them, which doth not seem to adhere to the great men of antiquity, particularly of Greece. I will not say, that our historians have less ability or less industry ; but I would say, that democratical governments, like those of ancient Greece, are more favourable to simplicity of manners, and consequently to the knowledge of the human mind, than our modern monarchies. At Athens and Sparta, the public assemblies, the public exercises, the regular attendance given to all the public solemnities, whether religious or civil, and other institutions that might be mentioned, gave the citizens many opportunities of being well acquainted with one another. There the great men were not cooped up in palaces and coaches ; they were almost constantly in the open air, and on foot. The people saw them every day, conversed with them, and observed their behaviour in the hours



of relaxation, as well as of business. Themistocles could call every citizen of Athens by his name ; a proof that the great men courted an universal acquaintance.

No degree of genius will ever make one a proficient in the science of man, without accurate observation of human nature in all its varieties. Homer, the greatest master in this science ever known, passed the most of his life in travelling : his poverty, and other misfortunes, made him often dependent on the meanest, as his talents recommended him to the friendship of the greatest ; so that what he says of Ulysses may justly be applied to himself, that “ he visited many states and nations, and knew the characters of many men.” Virgil had not the same opportunities : he lived in an age of more refinement, and was perhaps too much conversant in courtly life, as well as too bashful in his deportment, and delicate in his constitution, to study the varieties of human nature, where in a monarchy they are most conspicuous, namely in the middle and lower ranks of mankind. Need we wonder, then, that in the display of character he falls so far short of his great original ? Shakespeare was familiarly acquainted with all ranks and conditions of men ; without which, notwithstanding his unbounded imagination, it is not to be supposed, that he could have succeeded so well in delineating every species of human character, from the constable to the monarch, from the hero to the clown. And it deserves our notice, that, however ignorant he might be of Latin and Greek, he was well acquainted, by translation, with some of the ancients, particularly Plutarch, whom he seems to have studied with much attention, and who indeed excels all historians in exhibiting lively and interesting views of human nature. Great vicissitudes of fortune gave Fielding an opportunity of associa-



ting with all classes of men, except perhaps the highest, whom he rarely attempts to describe: Swift's way of life is well known: and I have been told, that Congreve used to mingle in disguise with the common people, and pass whole days and weeks among them.

That the ancient painters and statuaries were in many respects superior to the modern, is universally allowed. The monuments of their genius that still remain, would convince us of it, even though we were to suppose the accounts given by Pliny, Lucian, and other contemporary authors, to be a little exaggerated. The uncommon spirit and elegance of their attitudes and proportions are obvious to every eye: and a great master seems to think, that modern artists, though they ought to imitate, can never hope to equal the magnificence of their ideas, or the beauty of their figures\*. To account for this, we need not suppose, that human genius decays as the world grows older. It may be ascribed, partly to the superior elegance of the human form in those days, and partly to the artists having then better opportunities of observing the human body, free from the incumbrances of dress, in all the varieties of action and motion. The ancient discipline of the Greeks and Romans, particularly the former, was admirably calculated for improving the human body in health, strength, swiftness, flexibility, and grace. In these respects, therefore, they could hardly fail to excel the moderns, whose education and manners tend rather to enervate the body, and cramp all its faculties. And, as the ancients performed their exercises in public, and performed many of them naked, and thought it honourable to excel in them; as their clothing was much less cumbersome than our Gothic apparel, and shewed the body to more advan-

\* Fresnoy, *De Arte Graphica*, lin. 190.



tage; it must be allowed, that their painters and statuaries had far better opportunities of observation than ours enjoy, who see nothing but awkward and languid figures, disguised by an unwieldly and ungraceful attire.

Will it not, then, be acknowledged, that the ancients may have excelled the moderns in the science of human nature, provided it can be shewn, that they had better opportunities of observing it? That this was the case, appears from what has been already said. And that they really excelled us in this science, will not be doubted by those who acknowledge their superiority in rhetoric and criticism; two arts which are founded in the philosophy of the human mind. But a more direct proof of the point in question, may be had in the writings of Homer, Plutarch, and the Socratic philosophers; which, for their admirable pictures of human nature in its genuine simplicity, are not equalled by any compositions of a later date. Of Aristotle I say nothing. We are assured by those who have read his works, that no author ever understood human nature better than he. Fielding himself\* pays him this compliment; and his testimony will be allowed to have considerable weight.

Let me therefore recommend it to those philosophers who may hereafter make human nature the subject of their speculation, to study the ancients more than our modern sceptics seem to have done. If we set out, like the author of *The Treatise of Human Nature*, with a fixed purpose to advance as many paradoxes as possible; or with this foolish conceit, that men in all former ages were utter strangers to themselves, and to one another; and that we are the first of our species on whom Nature has bestowed any glimmerings of discernment; we may depend on it, that in proportion as our va-

\* Fielding's works, vol. xi. p. 384, London, 1766, 12mo.



nity and arrogance are great, our success will be small. It will be, like that of a musician, who should take it in his head, that Corelli had no taste in counterpoint, nor Handel or Jackson any genius for melody; of an epic poet, who should fancy that Homer, Virgil, and Milton, were very bad writers; or of a painter, who should suppose all his brethren of former times to have been unacquainted with the colours, lineaments, and proportions of visible objects.

If Columbus, before he set out on his famous expedition to the western world, had amused himself with writing a history of the countries he was going to visit; would the lovers of truth, and interpreters of nature, have received any improvement or satisfaction from such a specimen of his ingenuity? And is not the system which, without regard to experience, a philosopher frames in his closet, concerning the nature of man, equally frivolous? If Columbus, in such a history, had described the Americans with two heads, cloven feet, wings, and a scarlet complexion; and, after visiting them, and finding his description false in every particular, had yet published that description to the world, affirming it to be true, and at the same time acknowledging, that it did not correspond with his experience; I know not whether mankind would have been most disposed to blame his disingenuity, to laugh at his absurdity, or to pity his want of understanding. And yet we have known a metaphysician to contrive a system of human nature, and, though sensible that it did not correspond with the real appearances of human nature, deliver it to the world as incontrovertible truth; we have heard this system applauded as a masterpiece of genius, and admitted as incontrovertible truth; and we have seen the experience of individuals, the universal consent of nations, the accu-



mulated wisdom of ages, and every principle in philosophy, every truth in religion, and every dictate of common sense, sacrificed to this contemptible and self-contradictory chimera.

I would further recommend it to our moral philosophers, to study themselves with candour and attention, and cultivate an acquaintance with mankind, especially with those whose manners retain most of the truth and simplicity of nature. Acquaintance with the great makes a man of fashion, but will not make a philosopher. They who are ambitious to merit this appellation, think nothing below them which the author of nature has been pleased to create, to preserve, and to adorn.— Away with this passion for system-building! it is pedantry: away with this lust of paradox! it is presumption. Be equally ashamed of dogmatical prejudice, and sceptical incredulity; for both are as remote from the spirit of true philosophy, as bullying and cowardice from true valour.

It will be said, perhaps, that a general knowledge of man is sufficient for the philosopher; and that this particular knowledge which we recommend, is necessary only for the novelist and poet. But let it be remembered, that many important errors in moral philosophy have arisen from the want of this particular knowledge; and that it is by too little, not by too much experience, by scanty, not by copious induction, that philosophy is corrupted. Men have rarely framed a system, without first consulting experience in regard to some few obvious facts. We are apt to be prejudiced in favour of the notions that prevail within our own narrow circle; but we must quit that circle if we would divest ourselves of prejudice, as we must go from home if we would get rid of our provincial accent. “Horace asserts wisdom and good sense to be the source and principle of good writing; for

the attainment of which he prescribes a careful study of the Socratic, that is, moral wisdom, and a thorough acquaintance with human nature that great exemplar of manners, as he finely calls it; or, in other words, a wide extensive view of real practical life. The joint direction of these two," I quote the words of an admirable critic and most ingenuous philosopher, "as means of acquiring moral knowledge, is perfectly necessary. For the former, when alone, is apt to grow abstracted and unaffecting; the latter uninstrueting and superficial. The philosopher talks without experience, and the man of the world without principles. United they supply each other's defects; while the man of the world borrows so much of the philosopher, as to be able to adjust the several sentiments with precision and exactness; and the philosopher so much of the man of the world, as to copy the manners of life (which we can only do by experience) with truth and spirit. Both together furnish a thorough and complete comprehension of human life\*.

That I may not be thought a blind admirer of antiquity, I would here crave the reader's indulgence for one short digression more, in order to put him in mind of an important error in morals, inferred from partial and inaccurate experience, by no less a person than Aristotle himself. He argues, "That men of little genius, and great bodily strength, are by nature destined to serve, and those of better capacity, to command; that the natives of Greece, and of some other countries, being naturally superior in genius, have a natural right to empire; and that the rest of mankind, being natu-

\* Hurd's Commentary on Horace's Epistle to the Pisos, p. 25. edit. 4.



rally stupid, are destined to labour and slavery\*.” This reasoning is now, alas ! of little advantage to Aristotle’s countrymen, who have for many ages been doomed to that slavery, which, in his judgment, nature had destined them to impose on others ; and many nations whom he would have consigned to everlasting stupidity, have shown themselves equal in genius to the most exalted of human kind. It would have been more worthy of Aristotle, to have inferred man’s natural and universal right to liberty, from that natural and universal passion with which men desire it, and from the salutary consequences to learning, to virtue, and to every human improvement, of which it never fails to be productive. He wanted, perhaps, to devise some excuse for servitude ; a practice which to their eternal reproach, both Greeks and Romans tolerated even in the days of their glory.

Mr. Hume argues nearly in the same manner in regard to the superiority of white men over black. “ I am apt to suspect,” says he, “ the negroes, and in general all the other species of men, (for there are four or five different kinds), to be naturally inferior to the whites. There *never* was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, *nor even any individual* eminent either in action or speculation. *No* ingenious manufactures among them, *no* arts, *no* sciences.—There are negro-slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which *none* ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity†.” These assertions are strong ; but I know not whether they have any thing else to recommend them. For, first, though true, they would not prove the point in question, except it were also proved, that the Africans and Americans, even though arts and

\* De Republ. lib. 1. cap. 5, 6.

† Hume’s Essay on National Characters.



sciences were introduced among them, would still remain unsusceptible of cultivation. The inhabitants of Great Britain and France were as savage two thousand years ago, as those of Africa and America are at this day. To civilize a nation is a work which requires long time to accomplish. And one may as well say of an infant, that he can never become a man, as of a nation now barbarous, that it never can be civilized.—Secondly, of the facts here asserted, no man could have sufficient evidence, except from a personal acquaintance with all the negroes that now are, or ever were, on the face of the earth. These people write no histories; and all the reports of all the travellers that ever visited them, will not amount to any thing like a proof of what is here affirmed.—But, thirdly, we know that these assertions are not true. The empires of Peru and Mexico could not have been governed, nor the metropolis of the latter built after so singular a manner, in the middle of a lake, without men eminent both for action and speculation. Every body has heard of the magnificence, good government, and ingenuity, of the ancient Peruvians. The Africans and Americans are known to have many ingenious manufactures and arts among them, which even Europeans would find it no easy matter to imitate. Sciences indeed they have none, because they have no letters; but in oratory, some of them, particularly the Indians *of the Five Nations*, are said to be greatly our superiors. It will be readily allowed that the condition of a slave is not favourable to genius of any kind; and yet, the negro-slaves dispersed over Europe, have often discovered symptoms of ingenuity, notwithstanding their unhappy circumstances. They become excellent handicraftsmen, and practical musicians, and indeed learn every thing their masters are at pains to teach them, perfidy and de-



bauchery not excepted. That a negro-slave, who can neither read nor write, nor speak any European language, who is not permitted to do any thing but what his master commands, and who has not a single friend on earth, but is universally, considered and treated as if he were of a species inferior to the human ;—that such a creature should so distinguish himself among Europeans, as to be talked of through the world for a man of genius, is surely no reasonable expectation: To suppose him of an inferior species, because he does not thus distinguish himself, is just as rational, as to suppose any private European of an inferior species, because he has not raised himself to the condition of royalty.

Had the Europeans been destitute of the arts of writing and working in iron, they might have remained to this day as barbarous as the natives of Africa and America. Nor is the invention of these arts to be ascribed to our superior capacity. The genius of the inventor is not always to be estimated according to the importance of the invention. Gun-powder and the mariner's compass have produced wonderful revolutions in human affairs, and yet were accidental discoveries. Such, probably, were the first essays in writing and working in iron. Suppose them the effects of contrivance: they were at least contrived by a few individuals; and if they required a superiority of understanding, or of species, in the inventors, those inventors, and their descendants, are the only persons who can lay claim to the honour of that superiority.

That every practice and sentiment is barbarous which is not according to the usages of modern Europe, seems to be a fundamental maxim with many of our critics and philosophers. Their remarks often put us in mind of the fable of the man and the lion. If Negroes or Indians were disposed

to recriminate ; if a Lucian or a Voltaire from the coast of Guinea, or from the five nations, were to pay us a visit, what a picture of European manners might he present to his countrymen at his return ! Nor would caricatura, or exaggeration be necessary to render it hideous. A plain historical account of some of our most fashionable duelists, gamblers, and adulterers, (to name no more), would exhibit specimens of brutish barbarity, and sottish infatuation, such as might vie with any that ever appeared in Kamschatka, California, or the land of the Hottentots.

It is easy to see with what views some modern authors throw out these hints to prove the natural inferiority of negroes. But let every friend to humanity pray, that they may be disappointed. Britons are famous for generosity ; a virtue in which it is easy for them to excel both the Romans and the Greeks. Let it never be said, that slavery is countenanced by the bravest, and most generous people on earth ; by a people who are animated with that heroic passion, the love of liberty, beyond all nations ancient or modern ; and the fame of whose toilsome, but unwearied perseverance, in vindicating, at the expence of life and fortune, the sacred rights of mankind, will strike terror into the hearts of sycophants and tyrants, and excite the admiration and gratitude of all good men to the latest posterity.

### CHAP. III.

#### *Consequences of Metaphysical Scepticism.*

AFTER all, it will perhaps be objected to this discourse, that I have laid too much stress upon the consequences of metaphysical absurdity, and re-



presented them as much more dangerous than they are found to be in fact. I shall be told, that many of the controversies in metaphysic are merely verbal; and the errors proceeding from them of so abstract a nature, that philosophers run little risk, and the vulgar no risk at all, of being influenced by them in practice. It will be said, that I never heard of any man who fell a sacrifice to Berkeley's system, by breaking his neck over a material precipice, which he had taken for an ideal one; nor of any Fatalist, whose morals were, upon the whole, more exceptionable than those of the assertors of free agency: in a word, that whatever effect such tenets may have upon the understanding, they seldom or never produce any sensible effects upon the heart. In considering this objection, I must confine myself to a few topics, for the subject to which it leads is of vast extent. The influence of the metaphysical spirit upon art, science, and manners, would furnish matter for a large treatise. It will suffice at present to shew, that metaphysical errors are not harmless, but may produce, and actually have produced some very important and interesting consequences.

I begin with an observation often made, and indeed obvious enough, namely, That happiness is the end of our being; and that knowledge, and even truth itself, are valuable only as they tend to promote it. Every useless study is a pernicious thing, because it wastes our time and misemploys our faculties. To prove that metaphysical absurdities do no good, would therefore sufficiently justify the present undertaking. But it requires no deep sagacity to be able to prove a great deal more.

We acknowledge, however, that all metaphysical errors are not equally dangerous. There is an obscurity in the abstract sciences, as they are commonly taught, which is often no bad preservative against



their influence. This obscurity is sometimes unavoidable, on account of the insufficiency of language; sometimes it is owing to the spiritless and slovenly style of the writer; and sometimes it is affected: as when a philosopher, from prudential considerations, thinks fit to disguise any occasional attack on the religion or laws of his country, by some artful equivocation, in the form of allegory, dialogue, or fable\*. The style of *The Treatise of Human Nature* is so exceedingly obscure and uninteresting, that if the Author had not in his *Essays* re-published the capital doctrines of that work in a style more elegant and sprightly, a confutation of them would have been altogether unnecessary: their uncouth and gloomy aspect would have deterred most people from courting their acquaintance. And, after all, though this author is one of

\* Mr. Hume is not unacquainted with this piece of policy. His apology for Atheism he delivers by the mouth of a *friend*, in the way of conference, prefaced with a declaration, that though he cannot by any means approve many of the sentiments of that friend, yet he thinks they bear some relation to the chain of reasoning carried on in his inquiry concerning human nature. He had something, it seems, to say against his Maker, which he modestly acknowledges to be curious, and worthy of attention, and which he thought, no doubt, to be mighty smart and clever. To call it what it really is, An attempt to vindicate Atheism, or what he probably thought it, A vindication of Atheism, seemed dangerous, and might disgust many of his well-meaning readers: He calls it, therefore, *An Essay on a Particular Providence and a Future State*, and puts his capital arguments in the mouth of another person: thus providing by the same generous, candid, and manly expedient, a snare for the unwary reader, and an evasion for himself. Perhaps it will be asked, what I mean by the word *Atheist*? I answer, A reasonable creature, who disbelieves the being of God, or thinks it inconsistent with sound reason, to believe that the great First Cause is perfect in holiness, power, wisdom, justice and beneficence,—is a speculative Atheist; and he who endeavours to instill the same unbelief into others, is a practical Atheist.



the deadliest, he is not perhaps one of the most dangerous enemies of religion. Bolingbroke, his inferior in subtlety, but far superior in wit, eloquence, and knowledge of mankind, is more dangerous, because more entertaining. So that though the reader may be disposed to applaud the patriotism of the grand jury of Westminster, who presented the posthumous works of that noble lord as a public nuisance, he must be sensible that there was no necessity for affixing any such stigma to the philosophical writings of the Scottish author. And yet it cannot be denied, that even these, notwithstanding their obscurity, have done mischief enough to make every sober-minded person earnestly wish that they had never existed.

Further, some metaphysical errors are so grossly absurd, that there is hardly a possibility of their perverting our conduct. Such, considered in itself, is the doctrine of the non-existence of matter; which no man in his senses was ever capable of believing for a single moment. Pyrrho was a vain hypocrite: he took it in his head to say that he believed nothing, because he wanted to be taken notice of: he affected, too, to act up to this pretended disbelief; and would not of his own accord step aside to avoid a dog, a chariot, or a precipice: but he always took care to have some friends or servants at hand, whose business it was to keep the philosopher out of harm's way.—That the universe is nothing but a *heap* of impressions and ideas unperceived by any substance, is another of those profound mysteries, from which we need not apprehend much danger; because it is so perfectly absurd, that no words but such as imply a contradiction, will express it. I know not whether the absurdity of a system was ever before urged as an apology for its author. But it is better to be absurd than mischievous: and happy it were for the world,

and much to the credit of some persons now in it, if metaphysicians were chargeable with nothing worse than absurdity.

Again, certain errors in our theories of human nature, considered in themselves, are in some measure harmless, when the principles that oppose their influence are strong and active. A gentle disposition, confirmed habits of virtue, obedience to law, a regard to order, or even the fear of punishment, often prove antidotes to metaphysical poison. When Fatality has these principles to combat, it may puzzle the judgment, but will not corrupt the heart. Natural instinct never fails to oppose it; all men believe themselves free agents, as long at least as they keep clear of metaphysic; nay, so powerful is the sentiment of moral liberty, that I cannot think it was ever entirely subdued in any rational being. But if it were subdued, (and surely no Fatalist will acknowledge it invincible); if the opposite principles should at the same time cease to act; and if debauchery, bad example, and licentious writings, should extinguish or weaken the sense of duty; what might not be apprehended from men who are above law, or can screen themselves from punishment? What virtue is to be expected from a being who believes itself a mere machine? If I were persuaded, that the evil I commit is imposed upon me by fatal necessity, I should think repentance as absurd as Xerxes scourging the waves of the Hellespont; and be as little disposed to form resolutions of amendment, as to contrive schemes for preventing the frequent eclipses of the satellites of Jupiter. Every author who publishes an essay in behalf of Fatality, is willing to run the risk of bringing all men over to his opinion. What if this should be the consequence? If it be possible to make one reasonable creature a Fatalist, may it not be possible to make many such?



And would this be a matter of little or no moment? It is demonstrable, that it would not. But we have already explained ourselves on this head.

Other metaphysical errors there are, which, though they do not strike more directly at the foundations of virtue, are more apt to influence mankind, because they are not so vigorously counteracted by any particular propensity. What shall we say to the theory of Hobbes, who makes the distinction between vice and virtue to be wholly artificial, without any foundation in the divine will, or human constitution, and depending entirely on the arbitrary laws of human governors? According to this account, no action that is commanded by a king can be vitious, and none virtuous except warranted by that authority. Were this opinion universal, what could deter men from secret wickedness, or such as is not cognisable by law? What could restrain governors from the utmost insolence of tyranny? What but a miracle could save the human race from perdition.

In the preface to one of Mr. Hume's late publications, we are presented with an elaborate panegyric on the author. "He hath exerted, says the writer of the preface, those great talents he received from Nature, and the acquisitions he made by study, in search of truth, and in promoting the good of mankind." A noble encomium indeed! If it be a true one, what are we to think of a Douglas, a Campbell, a Gerard, a Reid, and some others, who have attacked several of Mr. Hume's opinions, and proved them to be contrary to truth, and subversive of the good of mankind? I thought indeed, that the works of those excellent writers had given great satisfaction to the friends of truth and virtue, and done an important service to society: but, if I believe this prefacer, I must look on them, as well as on this attempt of my own, with



detestation and horror. But before so great a change in my sentiments can take place, it will be necessary, that Mr. Hume prove, to my satisfaction, that he is neither the author nor the publisher of the *Essays* that bear his name, nor of the *Treatise of Human Nature*. For I will not take it on his, nor on any man's word, that religion, both revealed and natural, and all conviction in regard to truth, are detrimental to mankind. And it is most certain, that he, if he is indeed the author of those *Essays*, and of that *Treatise*, hath exerted his great talents, and employed several years of his life, in endeavouring to persuade the world, that the fundamental doctrines of natural religion are irrational, and the proofs of revealed religion such as ought not to satisfy an impartial mind; and that there is not in any science an evidence of truth sufficient to produce certainty. Suppose these opinions established in the world, and say, if you can, that the good of mankind would be promoted by them. To me it seems impossible for society to exist under the influence of such opinions. Nor let it be thought, that we give an unfavourable view of human nature, when we insist on the necessity of good principles for the preservation of good order. Such a total subversion of human sentiment is, I believe, impossible: mankind at their very worst, are not such monsters, as to admit it; reason, conscience, taste, habit, interest, fear, must perpetually oppose it: but the philosophy that aims at a total subversion of human sentiment is not on that account the less detestable. And yet it is said of the authors of this philosophy, that they exert their great talents in promoting the good of mankind. What an insult on human nature and common sense! If mankind are tame enough to acquiesce in such an insult, and servile enough to reply, "It is true, we have been much obliged to the cel-



brated sceptics of this most enlightened age,"—they would almost tempt one to express himself in the style of misanthropy, and say, "Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur."

Every doctrine is dangerous that tends to discredit the evidence of our senses, external or internal, and to subvert the original instinctive principles of human belief. In this respect the most unnatural and incomprehensible absurdities, such as the doctrine of the non-existence of matter, and of perceptions without a percipient, are far from being harmless; as they seem to lead, and actually have led, to universal scepticism; and set an example of a method of reasoning sufficient to overturn all truth, and pervert every human faculty. In this respect also we have proved the doctrine of fatality to be of most pernicious tendency, as it leads men to suppose their moral sentiments fallacious or equivocal; not to mention its influence on our notions of God, and natural religion. When a sceptic attacks one principle of common sense, he does in effect attack all; for if we are made distrustful of the veracity of instinctive conviction in one instance, we must, or at least we may, become equally distrustful in every other. A little scepticism introduced into science will soon assimilate the whole to its own nature; the fatal fermentation, once begun, spreads wider and wider every moment, till all the mass be transformed into rottenness and poison.

There is no exaggeration here. The present state of the abstract sciences is a melancholy proof, that what I say is true. This is called the age of reason and philosophy; and this is the age of avowed and dogmatical atheism. Sceptics have at last grown weary of doubting; and have now discovered, by the force of their *great talents*, that one thing at least is certain, namely, that God, and

religion, and immortality are empty sounds. This is the final triumph of our so much boasted philosophic spirit; these are the limits of the dominion of error, beyond which we can hardly conceive it possible for human sophistry to penetrate. Exult, O Metaphysic, at the consummation of thy glories. More thou canst not hope, more thou canst not desire. Fall down, ye mortals, and acknowledge the stupendous blessing: adore those men of *great talents*, those daring spirits, those patterns of modesty, gentleness, and candour, those prodigies of genius, those heroes in beneficence, who have thus laboured—to strip you of every rational consolation, and to make your condition ten thousand times worse than that of the beasts that perish.

Why can I not express myself with less warmth! Why can I not devise an apology for these philosophers, to screen them from this dreadful imputation of being the enemies and plagues of mankind!—Perhaps they do not themselves believe their own tenets, but publish them only as the means of getting a name and a fortune. But I hope this is not the case; God forbid that it should! for then the enormity of their guilt would surpass all power of language; we could only gaze at it, and tremble. Compared with such wickedness, the crimes of the thief, the robber, the incendiary, would almost disappear. These sacrifice the fortunes or the lives of some of their fellow creatures, to their own necessity or outrageous appetite! but those would run the hazard of sacrificing, to their own avarice or vanity, the happiness of all mankind, both here and hereafter. No; I cannot suppose it: the heart of man, however depraved, is not capable of such infernal malignity.—Perhaps they do not foresee the consequences of their doctrines. Berkeley most cer-



tainly did not.—But Berkeley did not attack the religion of his country, did not seek to undermine the foundations of virtue, did not preach or recommend Atheism. He erred; and who is free from error? but his intentions were irreproachable; and his conduct as a man, and a Christian, did honour to human nature.—Perhaps our modern sceptics are ignorant, that without the belief of a God, and the hope of immortality, the miseries of human life would often be insupportable. But can I suppose them in a state of total and invincible stupidity, utter strangers to the human heart, and to human affairs! Sure they would not thank me for such a supposition. Yet this I must suppose, or I must believe them to be the most cruel, the most perfidious, and the most profligate of men.

Caressed by those who call themselves the great, ingrossed by the formalities and fopperies of life, intoxicated with vanity, pampered with adulation, dissipated in the tumult of business, or amidst the vicissitudes of folly, they perhaps have little need, and little relish, for the consolations of religion. But let them know, that, in the solitary scenes of life, there is many an honest and tender heart pining with incurable anguish, pierced with the sharpest sting of disappointment, bereft of friends, chilled with poverty, racked with disease, scourged by the oppressor; whom nothing but trust in Providence, and the hope of a future retribution, could preserve from the agonies of despair. And do they, with sacrilegious hands, attempt to violate this last refuge of the miserable, and to rob them of the only comfort that had survived the ravages of misfortune, malice, and tyranny! Did it ever happen, that the influence of their execrable tenets disturbed the tranquillity of virtuous retirement, deepened the gloom of human distress, or aggravated the horrors of the grave? Is it possible,



that this may have happened in many instances? Is it probable that this hath happened, or may happen, in one single instance?—Ye traitors to human kind, ye murderers of the human soul, how can ye answer for it to your own hearts! Surely every spark of your generosity is extinguished for ever, if this consideration do not awaken in you the keenest remorse, and make you wish in bitterness of soul—But I remonstrate in vain. All this must have often occurred to you, and been as often rejected as utterly frivolous. Could I enforce the present topic by an appeal to your vanity, I might possibly make some impression: but to plead with you on the principles of benevolence or generosity, is to address you in language ye do not, or will not understand; and as to the shame of being convicted of absurdity, ignorance, and want of candour, ye have long ago proved yourselves superior to the sense of it.

But let not the lovers of truth be discouraged: Atheism cannot be of long continuance, nor is there much danger of its becoming universal. The influence of some conspicuous characters has brought it too much into fashion; which, in a thoughtless and profligate age, it is no difficult matter to accomplish. But when men have retrieved the powers of serious reflection, they will find it a frightful phantom; and the mind will return gladly and eagerly to its old endearments. One thing we certainly know; the fashion of sceptical and metaphysical systems soon passeth away. Those unnatural productions, the vile effusion of a hard and stupid heart, that mistakes its own restlessness for the activity of genius, and its own captiousness for sagacity of understanding, may, like other monsters, please awhile by their singularity; but the charm is soon over; and the succeeding age will be astonished to hear, that their forefathers were de-



luded, or amused, with such fooleries. The measure of scepticism seems indeed to be full; it is time for truth to vindicate her rights, and we trust they shall yet be completely vindicated. Such are the hopes and the earnest wishes of one, who has seldom made controversy his study, who never took pleasure in argumentation, and who disclaims all ambition of being reputed a subtle disputant; but who, as a friend to human nature, would account it his honour to be instrumental in promoting, though by means unpleasant to himself, the cause of virtue and true science, and in bringing to contempt that sceptical sophistry which is equally subversive of both.

## POSTSCRIPT.

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*November, 1770.*

TO read and criticise the modern systems of scepticism is so disagreeable a task, that nothing but a regard to duty could ever have determined me to engage in it. I found in them neither instruction nor amusement; I wrote against them with all the disgust that one feels in wrangling with an unreasonable adversary; and I published what I had written with the certain prospect of raising many enemies, and with such an opinion of my performance, as allowed me not to entertain any sanguine hopes of success. I thought it however possible, nay, and probable too, that this book might do good. I knew that it contained some matters of importance, which if I was not able to set them in the best light, might however, by my means, be suggested to others more capable to do them justice.

Since these papers were first published, I have laid myself out to obtain information of what has been said of them, both by their friends, and by their enemies; hoping to profit by the censures of the latter, as well as by the admonitions of the former. I do not hear, that any person has accused me of misconceiving or misrepresenting my adversaries' doctrine. Again and again have I requested it of those whom I knew to be masters of the whole controversy, to give me their thoughts freely on this point; and they have repeatedly told me, that, in their judgment, nothing of this kind can be laid to my charge.

Most of the objections that have been made I had foreseen, and, as I thought, sufficiently obviated



by occasional remarks in the course of the essay. But, in regard to some of them, I find it necessary now to be more particular. I wish to give the fullest satisfaction to every candid mind : and I am sure I do not, on these subjects, entertain a single thought which I need to be ashamed or afraid to lay before the public.

I have been much blamed \* for entering so warmly into this controversy. In order to prepossess the minds of those who had not read this performance, with an unfavourable opinion of it, and of its author, insinuations have been made, and carefully helped about, that it treats only of some abstruse points of speculative metaphysics ; which, however, I am accused of having discussed, or attempted to discuss, with all the zeal of the most furious bigot, indulging myself in an indecent vehemence of language, and uttering the most rancorous invectives against those who differ from me in opinion. Much, on this occasion, has been said in praise of moderation and scepticism ; moderation, the source of candour, good-breeding, and good-nature ; and scepticism, the child of impartiality, and the parent of humility. When men believe with full conviction, nothing, it seems, is to be expected from them but bigotry and bitterness : when they suffer themselves in their inquiries to be biassed by partiality, or warmed with affection they are philosophers no longer, but revilers and enthusiasts !—If this were a just account of the matter and manner of *the Essay on Truth*, I should not have the face to attempt an apology ; for were any person guilty of the fault here complained

\* In justice to the public I must here observe, that the clamour against me on account of this book, however loud and alarming at first, appears now to have been raised and propagated by a few persons of a particular party in Scotland ; and to have owed its rise to prejudice, and its progress to defamation ; to engines of malignity which an honest man would be much more sorry to see employed for him than against him.



of, I myself should certainly be one of the first to condemn him.

In the whole circle of human sciences, real or pretended, there is not any thing to be found which I think more perfectly contemptible than the speculative metaphysics of the moderns. It is indeed a most wretched medley of ill-digested notions, indistinct perceptions, inaccurate observations, perverted language, and sophistical argument ; distinguishing where there is no difference, and confounding where there is no similitude ; feigning difficulties where it cannot find them, and overlooking them when real. I know no end that the study of such a jargon can answer, except to harden and stupify the heart, bewilder the understanding, sour the temper, and habituate the mind to irresolution, captiousness, and falsehood. For studies of this sort I have neither time nor inclination, I have neither head nor heart. To enter into them at all, is foolish ; to enter into them with warmth, ridiculous ; but to treat those with any bitterness, whose judgments concerning them may differ from ours, is in a very high degree odious and criminal. Thus far, then, my adversaries and I are agreed. Had the sceptical philosophers confined themselves to those inoffensive wranglings that shew only the subtlety and captiousness of the disputant, but affect not the principles of human conduct, they never would have found an opponent in me. My passion for writing is not strong ; and my love of controversy so weak, that if it could always be avoided with a safe conscience, I would never engage in it at all. But when doctrines are published subversive of morality and religion ; doctrines, of which I perceive and have it in my power to expose the absurdity, my duty to the public forbids me to be silent ; especially when I see, that by the influence of fashion, folly, or more criminal causes, those doctrines spread wider and wider every day, diffusing ignorance, misery, and licentiousness, wherever they prevail. Let us oppose the



torrent, though we should not be able to check it. The zeal and example of the weak have often roused to action, and to victory, the slumbering virtue of the strong.

I likewise agree with my adversaries in this, that scepticism, where it tends to make men well-bred and good-natured, and to rid them of pedantry and petulance, without doing individuals or society any harm, is an excellent thing. And some sorts of scepticism there are, that really have this tendency. In philosophy, in history, in politics, yea, and even in theology itself, there are many points of doubtful disputation, in regard to which a man's judgment may lean to either of the sides, or hang wavering between them, without any inconvenience to himself, or others. Whether pure space exists or how we come to form an idea of it; whether all the objects of human reason may be fairly reduced to Aristotle's ten categories; whether Hannibal, when he passed the Alps, had any vinegar in his camp; whether Richard III. was as remarkable for cruelty and a hump-back, as is commonly believed; whether Mary Queen of Scotland married Bothwell from inclination, or from the necessity of her affairs; whether the earth is better peopled now than it was in ancient times; whether public prayers should be recited from memory or read:—in regard to these and such like questions, a little scepticism may be very safe and very proper, and I will never think the worse of a man for differing from me in opinion. And if ever it should be my chance to engage in controversy on such questions, I here *pledge myself to the public*, (*absit invidia verbo!*), that I will conduct the whole affair with the most exemplary coolness of blood, and lenity of language. I have always observed that strong conviction is much more apt to breed strife in matters of little moment, than in subjects of high importance. Not to mention (what I would willingly forget) the scandalous contests that have prevailed in the Christian world about



trifling ceremonies and points of doctrine, I need only put the reader in mind of those learned critics and annotators, Salmasius, Valla, and Scaliger, who, in their squabbles about words, gave scope to such rancorous animosity and virulent abuse, as is altogether without example. In every case, where dogmatical belief tends to harden the heart, or to breed prejudices incompatible with candour, humanity, and the love of truth, all good men will be careful to cultivate moderation and diffidence.

But there are other points in regard to which a strong conviction produces the best effects, and doubt and hesitation the worst: and these are the points that our sceptics labour to subvert, and I to establish. That the human soul is a real and permanent substance, that God is infinitely wise and good, that virtue and vice are essentially different, that there is such a thing as truth, and that man in many cases is capable of discovering it, are some of the principles which this book is intended to vindicate from the objections of scepticism. Attempts have been made to persuade us, that there is no evidence of truth in any science; that the human understanding ought not to believe any thing, but rather to remain in perpetual suspense between opposite opinions; that it is unreasonable to believe the Deity to be perfectly wise and good, or even to exist; that the soul of man has nothing permanent in its nature, nor indeed any kind of existence distinct from its present perceptions, which are continually changing, and will soon be at an end; and that moral distinctions are ambiguous and artificial, depending rather on human caprice and fashion, than on the nature of things, or the divine will. This scepticism, the reader will observe, is totally subversive of science, morality, and religion both natural and revealed. And this is the scepticism which I am blamed for having opposed with warmth and earnestness.

I desire to know, what good effects this scepticism is likely to produce? "It humbles," we are told,



“our pride of understanding.” Indeed ! And are they to be considered as patterns of humility, who set the wisdom of all former ages at nought, bid defiance to the common sense of mankind, and say to the wisest and best men that ever did honour to our nature, Ye are fools or hypocrites ; we only are candid, honest and sagacious? Is this humility! Should I be humble, if I were to speak and act in this manner! Every man of sense would pronounce me lost to all shame, an apostate from truth and virtue, an enemy to human kind ; and my own conscience would justify the censure.

And so, it seems that pride of understanding is inseparable from the disposition of those who believe that they have a soul, that there is a God, that virtue and vice are essentially different, and that men are in some cases permitted to discern the difference between truth and falsehood ! Yet the gospel requires or supposes the belief of all these points : the gospel also commands us to be humble : and the spirit and influence of the gospel have produced the most perfect examples of that virtue that ever appeared among men. A believer may be proud : but it is neither his belief, nor what he believes, that can make him so ; for both ought to teach him humility. To call in question, and labour to subvert, those first principles of science, morality and religion, which all the rational part of mankind acknowledge, is indeed an indication of a proud and presumptuous understanding : but does the sceptic lay this to the charge of the believer? I have heard of a thief, when close pursued, turning on his pursuers, and charging them with robbery : but I do not think the example worthy a philosopher’s imitation.

The prevention of bigotry is said to be another of the blessed effects of this modern scepticism. And indeed, if sceptics would act consistently with their own principles, there would be ground for the remark : for a man who believes nothing at all, can-



not be said to be blindly attached to any opinion, except perhaps to this one, that nothing is to be believed; in which, however, if he have any regard to uniformity of character, he will take care not to be dogmatical. But it is well known to all who have had any opportunity of observing his conduct, that the sceptic rejects those opinions only which the rest of mankind admit: for that, in adhering to his own paradoxes, the most devoted anchorite, the most furious inquisitor, is not a greater bigot than he. An ingenious author has therefore, with very good reason, made it one of the articles of the Infidel's creed, That, "he believes in all unbelief\*." Though a late writer is a perfect sceptic in regard to the existence of his soul and body, he is certain, that men have no idea of power: though he has many doubts and difficulties about the evidence of mathematical truth, he is quite positive that his soul is not the same thing to-day it was yesterday, and though he affirms that it is by an act of the human understanding, that two and two have come to be equal to four, yet he cannot allow, that to steal or to abstain from stealing, to act, or to cease from action, is in the power of any man. In reading sceptical books, I have often found, that the strength of the author's attachment to his paradox; is in proportion to its absurdity. If it deviates but a little from common opinion, he gives himself but little trouble about it; if it be inconsistent with universal belief, he condescends to argue the matter, and to bring what with him passes for a proof of it; if it be such as no man ever did or could believe, he is still more conceited of his proof, and calls it a demonstration; but if it is inconceivable, it is a wonder if he does not take it for granted. Thus, that our idea of extension, is extended, is inconceivable, and in the *Treatise of Human Nature* is taken for granted: that matter exists only in the mind that perceives it, is

\* Connoisseur, No. 9.



what no man ever did or could believe; and the author of the *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, has favoured the world with what passes among the fashionable metaphysicians for a demonstration of it: that moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues, are all upon the same footing, is inconsistent with universal belief; and a famous Essayist has argued the matter at large, and would fain persuade us, that he has proved it; though I do not recollect, that he triumphs in this proof as so perfectly irresistible, as those by which he conceives himself to have annihilated the idea of power, and exploded the existence and permanency of percipient substances. I will not say, however, that this gradation holds universally. Sceptics, it must be owned, bear a right zealous attachment to all their absurdities, both greater or less. If they are most warmly interested in behalf of the former, it is, I suppose, because they have had the sagacity to foresee, that those would stand most in need of their countenance and protection.

We see how far scepticism may be said to prevent bigotry. It prevents all bigotry, and all strong attachment on the side of truth and common sense; but in behalf of its own paradoxes, it establishes bigotry the most implicit and the most obstinate. It is true, that sceptics sometimes tell us, that, however positively they may assert their doctrines, they would not have us think them positive assertors of any doctrine. Sextus Empiricus has done this; and some too, if I mistake not, of our modern Pyrrhonists. But common readers are not capable of such exquisite refinement, as to believe, their author to be in earnest, and at the same time not in earnest; as to believe, that when he asserts some points with diffidence, and others with the utmost confidence, he holds himself to be equally diffident of all.

There is but one way in which it is possible for a sceptic to satisfy us, that he is equally doubtful of



all doctrines. He must assert nothing, lay down no principles, contradict none of the opinions of other people, and advance none of his own: in a word, he must confine his doubts to his own breast, at least the grounds of his doubts; or propose them modestly and privately, not with a view to make us change our mind, but only to shew his own diffidence. For, from the moment that he attempts to obtrude them on the public, or on any individual, or even to represent the opinion of others as less probable than his own, he commences a dogmatist; and is to be accounted more or less presumptuous, according as his doctrine is more or less repugnant to common sense, and himself more or less industrious to recommend it.

Though he were to content himself with urging objections, without seeking to lay down any principle of his own, which however is a degree of moderation that no sceptic ever yet arrived at, we would not on that account pronounce him an inoffensive man. If his objections have ever weakened the moral or religious belief of any one person, he has injured that person in his dearest and most important concerns. They who know the value of true religion, and have had any opportunity of observing its effects on themselves or others, need not be told, how dreadful to a sensible mind it is, to be staggered in its faith by the cavils of the infidel. Every person of common humanity, who knows any thing of the heart of man, would shudder at the thought of infusing scepticism into the pious Christian. Suppose the Christian to retain his faith in spite of all objections; yet the confutation of these cannot fail to distress him; and a habit of doubting, once begun, may, to the latest hour of his life, prove fatal to his peace of mind. Let no one mistake or misrepresent me: I am not speaking of those points of doctrine which rational believers allow to be indifferent: I speak of those great and most essential articles of faith; the existence of a Deity, infinitely



wise, beneficent, and powerful ; the certainty of a future state of retribution ; and the divine authority of the gospel. These are the articles which some late authors labour with all their might to overturn ; and these are the articles which every person who loves virtue and mankind, would wish to see ardently and zealously defended. Is it bigotry to believe these sublime truths with full assurance of faith ? I glory in such bigotry : I would not part with it for a thousand worlds : I congratulate the man who is possessed of it ; for, amidst all the vicissitudes and calamities of the present state, that man enjoys an inexhaustible fund of consolation, of which it is not in the power of fortune to deprive him. Calamities, did I say ? The evils of a very short life will not be accounted such by him who has a near and certain prospect of a happy eternity.—Will it be said, that the firm belief of these divine truths did ever give rise to ill-nature or persecution ? It will not be said, by any person who is at all acquainted with history, or the human mind. Of such belief, when sincere, and undebased by criminal passions, meekness, benevolence, and forgiveness, are the natural and necessary effects. There is not a book on earth so favourable to all the kind, and all the sublime affections, or so unfriendly to hatred and persecution, to tyranny, injustice, and every sort of malevolence, as that very gospel against which our sceptics entertain such a rancorous antipathy. Of this they cannot be ignorant, if they have ever read it ; for it breathes nothing throughout but mercy, benevolence, and peace. If they have not read it, they and their prejudices are as far below our contempt as any thing so hateful can be : if they have, their pretended concern for the rights of mankind is all hypocrisy and a lie. Nor need they attempt to frame an answer to this accusation, till they have proved, that the morality of the gospel is faulty or imperfect ; that virtue is not useful to individuals, nor beneficial to society ; that the evils of life are most ef-



fectually alleviated by the extinction of all hope ; that annihilation is a much more encouraging prospect to virtue, than the certain view of eternal happiness ; that nothing is a greater check to vice, than a firm persuasion that no punishment awaits it ; and that it is a consideration full of misery to a good man, when weeping on the grave of a beloved friend, to reflect, that they shall soon meet again in a better state, never to part any more. Till the teachers and abettors of infidelity have proved these points or renounced their pretensions to universal patriotism, their character is polluted with all the infamy that can be implied in the appellation of *liar* and *hypocrite*.

I wonder at those men who charge upon Christianity all the evils that superstition, avarice, sensuality, and the love of power, have introduced into the Christian world ; and then suppose, that these evils are to be prevented, not by suppressing criminal passions, but by extirpating Christianity, or weakening its influence. In fact, our religion supplies the only effectual means of suppressing these passions, and so preventing the mischief complained of ; and this it will ever be more or less powerful to accomplish, according as its influence over the minds of men is greater or less ; and greater or less will its influence be, according as its doctrines are more or less firmly believed. It was not, because they were Christians, but because they chose to be the avaricious and blood-thirsty slaves of an avaricious and blood-thirsty tyrant, that Cortez and Pizarro perpetrated those diabolical cruelties in Peru and Mexico, the narrative of which is insupportable to humanity. Had they been Christians in any thing but in name, they would have loved their neighbour as themselves ; and no man who loves his neighbour as himself, will ever cut his throat or roast him alive, in order to get at his money.

If zeal be warrantable on any occasion, it must be so in the present controversy : for I know of no



doctrines more important in themselves, or more affecting to a sensible mind, than those which the scepticism confuted in this book tends to subvert. But why, it may be said, should zeal be warrantable on any occasion? The answer is easy: Because on some occasions it is decent and natural. When a man is deeply interested in his subject, it is not natural for him to keep up the appearance of as much coolness, as if he were disputing about an indifferent matter: and whatever is not natural is always offensive. Were he to hear his dearest friends branded with the appellation of knaves and ruffians, would it be natural, would it be decent, for him to preserve the same indifference in his look, and softness in his manner, as if he were investigating a truth in conic sections, arguing about the cause of the Aurora Borealis, or settling a point of ancient history? Ought he not to shew, by the sharpness as well as by the solidity of his reply, that he not only disavows, but detests the accusation? Is there a man whose indignation would not kindle at such an insult? Is there a man who would be so much overawed by any antagonist, as to conceal his indignation? Of such a man I shall only say, that I would not choose him for my friend. When our subject lies near our heart our language must be animated, or it will be worse than lifeless; it will be affected and hypocritical. Now what subject can lie nearer the heart of a Christian, or of a man, than the existence and perfections of God, and the immortality of the human soul? If he can not, if he ought not to hear with patience the blasphemies belched by unthinking profligates in their common conversation, with what temper of mind will he listen or reply to the cool, insidious, and envenomed impieties of the deliberate-Atheist!—Fye on it! that I should need to write so long an apology for being an enemy to Atheism and nonsense!

“ But why engage in the controversy at all? Let the infidel do his worst, and heap sophism on so-



“ phism, and rail, and blaspheme as long as he  
“ pleases ; if your religion be from God, or founded  
“ in reason, it cannot be overthrown. Why then  
“ give yourself or others any trouble with your at-  
“ tempts to support a cause, against which it is said  
“ that hell itself shall not prevail ?”—This objec-  
tion has been made, and urged too with confidence.  
It has just as much weight as the following. Why  
enact laws against, or inflict punishment upon mur-  
derers ? Let them do their worst, and stab, and  
strangle, and poison, as much as they please, they  
will never be able to accomplish the final extermi-  
nation of the human species, nor perhaps to depo-  
pulate a single province.—Such idle talk deserves  
no answer, or but a very short one. We do be-  
lieve, and therefore we rejoice, that our religion  
shall flourish in spite of all the sophistry of malevo-  
lent men. But is their sophistry the less wicked on  
that account ? Does it not deserve to be punished  
with ridicule and confutation ? Have we reason to  
hope, that a miracle will be wrought to save any in-  
dividual from infidelity, or even any believer from  
those doubts and apprehensions which the writings  
of infidels are intended to raise ? And is it not worth  
our while, is it not our duty, ought it not to be our  
inclination, to endeavour to prevent such a calamity ?  
Nor let us imagine that this is the business of the  
clergy alone. They, no doubt, are best qualified  
for this service ; but we of the laity who believe the  
gospel, are under the same obligation to wish well,  
and according to our ability, to do good to our fel-  
low-creatures. For my own part, though the writ-  
ing of this book had been a work of much greater  
difficulty and labour than I found it to be, I would  
have cheerfully undertaken it, in the hope of being  
instrumental in reclaiming even a single sceptic  
from his unhappy prejudices, or in preserving even  
a single believer from the horrors of scepticism.  
Tell me not, that those horrors have no existence.  
I know the contrary. Tell me not, that the good



ends proposed can never in any degree be accomplished by performances of this kind. Of this too I know the contrary.

Suppose a set of men, subjects of the British government, to publish books setting forth, That liberty, both civil and religious, is an absurdity ; that trial by juries, the *Habeas Corpus* act, Magna Charta, and the Protestant religion, are intolerable nuisances ; and that Popery, despotism, and the inquisition, ought immediately to be established throughout the whole British empire ; suppose them to exhort their countrymen to overturn, or at least to disregard our excellent laws and constitution, and make a tender of their souls and consciences to the Pope, and of their lives and fortunes to the Grand Seignior ; —and suppose them to write so cautiously as to escape the censure of the law, and yet with plausibility sufficient to seduce many, and give rise to much dissatisfaction, discord and licentious practice, equally fatal to the happiness of individuals and to the public peace :—With what temper would an Englishman of sense and spirit set about confuting their principles ? Would it be decent, or even pardonable, to handle such a subject with coolness, or to behave with complaisance towards such adversaries ? Suppose them to have specious qualities, and to pass with their own party for men of candour, genius and learning : yet the lover of liberty and mankind would not, I presume, be disposed to pay them any excessive compliments on that account, or on any other. But suppose these political apostates to appear, in the course of the controversy, chargeable with ignorance and sophistical reasoning, with evasive and quibbling refinements, with misrepresentation of common facts, and misapprehension of common language, more attached to hypothesis than to the truth, preferring their own conceits to the common sense of mankind, and seeking to gratify their own exorbitant vanity and lust of paradox, though at the expence of the happiness of millions :—with



what face could their most abject flatterers, and most implicit admirers, complain of the severity of that antagonist who should treat both them and their principles with contempt and indignation? with what face urge in their defence, that, though perhaps somewhat blameable on the present occasion, they and their works were notwithstanding intitled to universal esteem, and the most respectful usage, on account of their skill in music, architecture, geometry, and the Greek and Latin tongues! On this account, would they be in any less degree the pests of society, or the enemies of mankind? would their false reasoning be less sophistical, their presumption less arrogant, or their malevolence less atrocious? Do not the men who, like Alexander, Machiavel, and the author of *La Pucelle d'Orleans*, employ their great talents in destroying and corrupting mankind, aggravate all their other crimes by the dreadful addition of ingratitude and breach of trust? And are not their characters, for this very reason, the more obnoxious to universal abhorrence? An illiterate blockhead in the Robinhood tavern, blaspheming the Saviour of mankind, or labouring to confound the distinctions of vice and virtue, is a wicked wretch, no doubt; but his wickedness admits of some shadow of excuse: he might plead his ignorance, his stupidity, and the still more profligate lives and principles of those whom the world, by a preposterous figure of speech, is pleased to call his betters: but the men of parts and learning, who join in the same infernal cry, are criminals of a much higher order; for in their defence nothing can be pleaded that will not aggravate their guilt.

My design in this book was, to give others the very same notions of the sceptical philosophy that I myself entertain; which I could not possibly have done, if I had not taken the liberty to deliver my thoughts plainly and without reserve. And truly I saw no reason for being more indulgent to the writ-



ings of sceptics, than to those of other men. The taste of the public requires not any such extraordinary condescension. If ever it should, which is not probable, we may then think it prudent to comply; but, as we scorn, in matters of such moment, to express ourselves by halves, we will then also throw pen and ink aside, never to be resumed until we again find, that we may with safety write, and be honest at the same time.

Infidels take it upon them to treat religion and its friends with opprobrious language, misrepresentation, undeserved ridicule, and divers other sorts of abuse. Some of them assert, with the most dogmatical assurance, what they know to be contrary to the common sense of mankind. All this passes for wit, and eloquence, and liberal inquiry, and a manly spirit. But whenever the friends of truth espouse, with warmth, that cause which they know to be agreeable to common sense and universal opinion, this is called *bigotry*: and whenever the Christian vindicates, with earnestness, those principles which he believes to be of the highest importance, and which he knows to be essential to the happiness of man, immediately he is charged with want of moderation, want of temper, enthusiasm, and the spirit of persecution. Far be it from the lover of truth to imitate those authors in misrepresentation, or in endeavouring to expose their adversaries to unmerited ridicule. But if a man were to obtain a patent for vending poison, it would be very hard to deny his neighbour the privilege of selling the antidote. If their zeal in spreading and recommending their doctrines be suffered to pass without censure, our zeal in vindicating ours has at least as good a title to pass uncensured. If this is not allowed, I must suppose; that the present race of infidels, like the *jure divino* kings, imagine themselves invested with some peculiar sanctity of character; that whatever they are pleased to say is to be received as law and the fashion; and that to contradict their will, or



even address them without prostration, is indecent and criminal. I know not whence it is that they assume these airs of superiority. Is it from the high rank some of them hold in the world of letters? I would have them to know, that it is but a short time since that high rank was either yielded to, or claimed by such persons. Spinoza, Hobbes, Collins, Woolston, and the rest of that tribe, were within these forty or fifty years accounted a very contemptible brotherhood. The great geniuses of the last age treated them with little ceremony; and would not, I suppose, were they now alive, pay more respect to imitators, copiers, and plagiaries, than they did to the original authors. If the enemies of our religion would profit by experience, they might learn, from the fate of some of their most renowned brethren, that infidelity, however fashionable and lucrative, is not the most convenient field for a successful display of genius. Ever since Voltaire, stimulated by avarice, and other dotages incident to unprincipled old age, formed the scheme of turning a penny by writing three or four volumes yearly against the Christian religion, he has dwindled from a genius of no common magnitude into a paltry book-maker; and now think he does great and terrible things, by retailing the crude and long exploded notions of the free-thinkers of the last age, which, when seasoned with a few mistakes, misrepresentations, and ribaldries of his own, form such a mess of falsehood, impiety, obscenity, and other abominable ingredients, as nothing but the monstrous maw of an illiterate infidel can either digest or endure. Several of our famous sceptics have lived to see the greatest part of their profane tenets confuted. I hope, and earnestly wish, that they may live to make a full recantation. Some of them must have known, and many of them might have known, that their tenets were confuted before they adopted them: yet did they adopt them notwithstanding, and display them to the world with as



much confidence as if nothing had ever been advanced on the other side. So have I seen a testy and stubborn dogmatist, when all his arguments were answered, and all his invention exhausted, comfort himself at last with simply repeating his former positions at the end of each new remonstrance from the adversary.

They who are conversant in the works of the sceptical philosophers, know very well, that those gentlemen do not always maintain that moderation of style which might be expected from persons of their profession; and if I thought my conduct in this respect needed to be or could be, justified by such a precedent, I might plead even their example as my apology. But I disclaim every plea that such a precedent could afford me: I write not in the spirit of retaliation; and when I find myself inclined to be an imitator, I will look out for other models. Indeed it is hardly to be supposed, that I would take those for my pattern, whose talents I despise, whose writings I detest, and whose principles and projects are so directly opposite to mine. Their writings tend to subvert the foundation of human knowledge, to poison the sources of human happiness, and to overturn that religion which the best and wisest of men have believed to be of divine original, and which every good man, who understands it, must reverence as the greatest blessing ever conferred upon the human race. I write with a view to counteract those tendencies, by vindicating some fundamental articles of religion and science from the sceptical objections, and by shewing, that no man can attempt to disprove the first principles of knowledge without contradicting himself. To the common sense of mankind, they scruple not to oppose their own conceits, as if they judged these to be more worthy of credit than any other authority, human or divine. I urge nothing with any degree of confidence or fervour, in which I have not good reason to think myself warranted by the common sense



of mankind. Does their cause, then, or does mine, deserve the warmest attachment? Have they, or have I, the most need to guard against vehemence of expression\*? As certainly as the happiness of mankind is a desirable object, so certainly is my cause good, and theirs evil.

To conclude: Liberty of speech and writing is one of those high privileges that distinguish Great-Britain from all other nations. Every good subject wishes, that it may be preserved to the latest posterity; and would be sorry to see the civil power interpose to check the progress of rational inquiry. Nay, when inquiry ceases to be rational, and becomes both whimsical and pernicious, advancing as far as some late authors have carried it, to controvert the first principles of knowledge, morality and religion, and consequently the fundamental laws of the British government, and of all well-regulated society; even then, it must do more hurt than good to oppose it with the arm of flesh. For persecution and punishment for the sake of opinion, seldom fail to strengthen the party they are intended to suppress; and when opinions are combated by such weapons only, (which would probably be the case if the law were to interpose), a suspicion arises in the minds of men, that no other weapons are to be had; and therefore that the sectary, though destitute of power, is not wanting in argument. Let opinions then be combated by reason, and let ridicule be em-

\* “ There is no satisfying the demands of false delicacy,” says an elegant and pious author, “ because they are not regulated by any fixed standard. But a man of candour and judgment will allow, that the bashful timidity practised by those who put themselves on a level with the adversaries of religion, would ill become one who, declining all disputes, asserts primary truths on the authority of common sense; and that whoever pleads the cause of religion in this way, has a right to assume a firmer tone, and to pronounce with a more decisive air, not upon the strength of his own judgment, but on the reverence, due from all mankind to the tribunal to which he appeals.”

*Oswald's Appeal in behalf of religion, p. 14.*



ployed to expose nonsense. And to keep our licentious authors in awe, and to make it their interest to think before they write, to examine facts before they draw inferences, to read books before they criticise them, and to study both sides of a question before they take it upon them to give judgment, it would not be amiss, if their vices and follies, as authors, were sometimes chastised by a satirical severity of expression. This is a proper punishment for their fault; this punishment they certainly deserve; and this it is not beneath the dignity of a philosopher, or divine, or any man who loves God and his fellow-creatures, to inflict. Milton, Locke, Cudworth, Sidney, Tillotson, and several of the greatest and best writers of the present age, have set the example; and have, I doubt not, done good by their nervous and animated expression, as well as by the solidity of their arguments. This punishment, if inflicted with discretion, might teach our licentious authors something of modesty, and of deference to the judgment of mankind; and, it is to be hoped, would in time bring down that spirit of presumption, and affected superiority, which hath of late distinguished their writings, and contributed, more perhaps than all their subtlety and sophistry, to the seduction of the ignorant, the unwary, and the fashionable. It is true, the best of causes may be pleaded with an excess of warmth; as when the advocate is so blinded by his zeal as to lose sight of his argument; or as when, in order to render his adversaries odious, he alludes to such particulars of their character or private history as are not to be gathered from their writings. The former fault never fails to injure the cause which the writer means to defend: the latter, which is properly termed *personal abuse*, is in itself so hateful, that every person of common prudence would be inclined to avoid it for his own sake, even though he were not restrained by more weighty motives. If an author's writings be subversive of virtue, and dangerous to private happiness, and the public good, we



ought to hold them in detestation, and, in order to counteract their baneful tendency, to endeavour to render them detestable in the eyes of others; thus far we act the part of honest men, and good citizens: but with his private history we have no concern; nor with his character, except in so far as he has thought proper to submit it to the public judgment, by displaying it in his works. When these are of that peculiar sort, that we cannot expose them in their proper colours, without reflecting on his abilities and moral character, we ought by no means to sacrifice our love of truth and mankind to a complaisance which, if we are what we pretend to be, and ought to be, would be hypocritical at best, as well as mockery of the public, and treachery to our cause. The good of society is always to be considered as a matter of higher importance than the gratification of an author's vanity. If he does not think of this in time, and take care that the latter be consistent with the former, he has himself to blame for all the consequences. The severity of Collier's attack upon the stage, in the end of the last century, was, even in the judgment of one \* who thought it excessive, and who will not be suspected of partiality to that author's doctrine, productive of very good effects; as it obliged the succeeding dramatic poets to curb that propension to indecency, which had carried some of their predecessors so far beyond the bounds of good taste and good manners. If we are not permitted to answer the objections of the infidel as plainly, and with as little reserve as he makes them, we engage him on unequal terms. And many will be disposed to think most favourably of that cause, whose adherents display the greatest ardour; and some, perhaps, may be tempted to impute to timidity, or to a secret diffidence of our principles, what might have been owing to a much more pardonable weakness. Nay, if we pay our sceptical adversaries their full demand of compliment and

\* Colley Cibber. See his Apology, vol. 1. p. 201.



adulation; and magnify their genius and virtue, while we confute their atheistical and nonsensical sophisms; and speak with as much respect of their pitiful conceits and flimsy wranglings, as of the sublimest discoveries in philosophy; is there not reason to fear that our writings will do little or no service? For, may not some of our readers question our sincerity? May not many of them continue the admirers and dupes of the authors whom we seem so passionately to admire, and whose merit will not appear to them the less conspicuous that it is acknowledged by an avowed antagonist? And lastly, will not the adversaries themselves, more gratified than hurt by such a confutation, because more ambitious of applause, than concerned for truth, rejoice in their fancied superiority; and, finding their books become every day more popular and marketable by the consequence we give them, be encouraged to persist in their malevolent and impious career?

For my own part, though I have always been, and shall always be, happy in applauding excellence wherever I find it; yet neither the pomp of wealth nor the dignity of office, neither the frown of the great nor the sneer of the fashionable, neither the sciolist's clamour nor the profligate's resentment, shall ever sooth or frighten me into an admiration, real or pretended, of impious tenets, sophistical reasoning, or that paltry metaphysic with which literature has been so disgraced and pestered of late years. I am not so much addicted to controversy, as ever to enter into any but what I judge to be of very great importance: and into such controversy I cannot, I will not enter with coldness and unconcern. If I should, I might please a party, but I must offend the public; I might escape the censure of those whose praise I would not value; but I should justly forfeit the esteem of good men, and incur the disapprobation of my own conscience.

THE END.











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